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Esther: Historical & Chronological Comments (II)

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C. The Battle of Gog and Magog (Ezekiel 38-39)

(continued for previous issue)

A final corroboration of this interpretive hypothesis comes from what we might call the "Amalek Pattern" in the Bible. Note in Genesis 12-15 that Abram moves into the land after escaping Pharaoh (ch. 12), settles down and experiences peace and prosperity (ch. 13), and then faces an invasion of a worldwide alliance of nations (ch. 14). This alliance captures Lot, but Abram rescues him, after which a Gentile priest blesses Abram (ch. 14). Finally, after this, God appears to Abram in a vision and makes covenant with him (ch. 15), guaranteeing him a "house."

Now look at Moses: After escaping Pharaoh (Ex. 1-14), the people are given food and water in the wilderness (Ex. 16). Then Amalek attacks and kills many Lot-like stragglers (Ex. 17; Dt. 25:17-19). Moses defeats Amalek, after which a Gentile priest (Jethro) blesses the people, and then God appears in the Cloud and makes covenant with them (Ex. 18-24), including the building of a "house" (the Tabernacle).

The same themes show up in the history of David: After escaping Pharaoh Saul (1 Sam. 18-26), David finds a place of rest in the "wilderness" at Ziklag (ch. 27). Then Amalek attacks and steals David's wives (ch. 30), but David defeats them. Following this, a Gentile priest-king (Hiram of Tyre, who as a Gentile king was also a priest) blesses David (2 Sam. 5:11-12), and then God appears to David in a vision, promising him a "house" (2 Sam. 7).

In this pattern, the attack of Gentile world powers (Gen. 14) is associated with the attack of Amalek (Ex. 17; 1 Sam. 27). As can plainly be seen, the same pattern recurs in the Restoration. After departing from Babylon, the people settle in the land and experience a degree of

peace. Then comes the attack of Amalek and Gog & Magog. After this, Gentile priest-kings sponsor the return of Nehemiah to restore the land and the "house."

While it would be fascinating to follow up this theme in the Gospels, Acts, and possibly Revelation, enough has been said to indicate that it is a recurring pattern, and one that lends some support to the hypothesis that the attack of Gog and Magog is fulfilled in the book of Esther.

D. The Book of Esther in Covenant History

1. In General.

From what we have just seen, it is clear that the events in Esther are an integral part of the history of the formation of the Restoration Covenant Era. Amalek attacks. Amalek is spoiled. The spoils are used to build the Temple, in the sense that the crude Temple of Zerubbabel can now be glorified with these spoils.

This is not understood by the commentators for two reasons. One, the period of the Restoration is not generally considered as such. Bible histories view the time "after the exile" as some kind of coda or appendix to Old Testament history. In reality, it was the formation of a new covenant, the first phase of the "last days." It was the first phase of the New Covenant. This new covenant had new arrangements, set in place in the God-given books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Ezekiel. Yet, surveys of the history of the covenant usually discuss the Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants, overlooking the Remnant Covenant set up by Elijah and Elisha, and the Restoration Covenant. If this new covenant had been understood as a distinct new era, the place of Esther in covenant history would have become clear before now. As it stands, we must rectify this mistake.

The Sinaitic Covenant was made with Moses, and then implemented by Joshua. The Kingdom Covenant was made with David, and then implemented by Solomon. The Restoration Covenant was made with Cyrus, insofar as its imperial aspect is concerned, and implemented by Darius. Cyrus is the new international David, and Darius is the new international Solomon. Cyrus, like David, conquers the world and sets the stage for the building of the Temple. Darius orders that the Temple be built, and sees to it.

Additionally, and this is important: Solomon's marriage to the daughter of Egypt is celebrated in the Song of Solomon, where the girl is called "Shulamith," which simply means Mrs. Sholomo, Solomon's name in Hebrew. The book of Esther is the Restoration equivalent to the Song of Solomon. It is the "Song of Darius."

The imagery in the Song of Solomon is taken from the Temple of Solomon. The two interpret one another. The Temple is the Bride, as the New Jerusalem later on is the Bride. Similarly, Esther is all about the Restoration Temple. The palace of Darius-Ahasuerus is described in terms that closely correspond to the Temple itself. Ahasuerus marries Esther right after the Temple is rebuilt. The attack on the Jews, which is also an attack on the Bride Esther, corresponds to the attempts by the wicked to prevent Nehemiah from rebuilding Jerusalem. And of course, in Esther the spoils of the holy war are given to the Temple.

2. Esther as New Exodus.

In *Through New Eyes*, I discussed the "Exodus Pattern" on 182-187. Esther follows this pattern. When we see that there is a new exodus happening in Esther, we see again how intimately Esther is tied to the whole course of redemptive history. Esther is not a specimen of "wisdom literature" that is to the side of covenant history. Rather, the events of Esther are absolutely essential to the development of the kingdom of God from Adam to Christ. Esther is as important as Exodus.

As I pointed out in the book just mentioned, every detail of the Exodus Pattern is not present in every instance of it, and there are twists in the way the pattern is presented; yet the pattern is always obvious and clear. Here is the sequence, as applied to Esther:

1. *Some threat, some aspect of sin or of the curse, drives God's people from their home.* The sins of Israel drove the Jews into exile in Babylon, which became Persia.

2. *During the sojourn in captivity, Eve is assaulted by the Serpent, who wishes to use her to raise up his own wicked seed.* While nothing is said about Ahasuerus' desiring children from Esther, he does take her into his harem because she is beautiful, the same reason Pharaoh took Sarai from Abram in Genesis 12 (one of the earliest exoduses). In the Esther events, though, there is a twist: the "attack" on Eve is not really an attack at all, but is

something Mordecai and Esther cooperate with. Thus, in a wider sense the attack on Eve in this story if Haman's attack on the bride of Yahweh, of which Esther is the focal point and representative.

3. *The righteous use "holy deception" to trick the serpent and protect Eve.* Esther tricks Haman into thinking he is going to be honored, and in a way tricks Ahasuerus into a situation where he is confronted with Haman's perfidy.

4. *Very often, God's people are enslaved during the sojourn outside the land.* That is not the case in this instance.

5. *God brings blessings upon His people during the captivity, but plagues the tyrant, either progressively or as part of the deliverance.* Haman notes that the Jews have the blessing of keeping their own laws in the empire of Persia. It is also implied that the Jews are wealthy, because Haman has his eye on plundering them, and intends to give a huge amount of this plunder to Ahasuerus (Esther 3). The destruction of Haman and Magog are the plagues on the tyrant in this instance.

6. *God miraculously intervenes, often with visions to the pagan lord, in order to save His people.* The book of Esther calls on us to recognize God's hand behind the scenes. The dream given to the pagan lord during the night is, in this case, Ahasuerus' sleepless night during which he is read the chronicles of his reign, and determines to bless Mordecai.

7. *Very often the serpent tries to shift blame and accuses the righteous man of being the cause of the difficulty.* No such scene is found in Esther, though in Esther 3 Haman insinuates to Ahasuerus that the Jews are troubling his empire.

8. *God humiliates the false gods of the enemy.* In the case of Esther, this also takes place behind the scenes. Haman-Gog clearly has his own gods; in fact, when he boasts of his glory and praises his own accomplishments, Haman seems to be his own god (Esther 5:11).

There is a twist on this aspect of the Exodus Pattern in Esther. Mordecai, while outwardly a Jew, tells Esther to conceal her people. He also rebels against the righteous decree of King Ahasuerus. He is a perfect example of the kind of sins that took the Jews into exile: rebelling against the gentile powers God Himself had installed, while failing to conduct evangelism and witness by owning up to who they really are. This is the wickedness that God humiliates in Esther, when Esther is forced to declare herself, and Mordecai becomes a servant of the king.

9. *God's people depart with spoils.* Since God wanted the Jews to be "spread out as the four winds" within the empire, no geographical departure was needed. We have already commented on the spoils.

10. *On the way, God's people are attacked by Amalek.* In Exodus 17 and 1 Samuel 15 we see this pattern. Here it is again. Cyrus has let the people return,

which is the initial exodus. Now Amalek attacks in the person of Haman the Agagite, descendant of the king of Amalek. This time, however, the attack of Amalek is expanded into a recapitulation of the whole exodus pattern.

11. *Finally, God's people are installed in the Holy Land.* Such installment means building God's house out of some of the spoils. We have seen that this is clearly implied by the fact that the Jews did not personally take the spoils, but set them aside for God. Ezekiel's Temple, described after the battle of Gog and Magog, serves to make this point.

3. What Esther Accomplishes in Covenant History.

The events of Esther, and the way they are recorded, are essential for an understanding of the Restoration Covenant Era, and bring about a necessary shift in the understanding of God's people. First, though Jeremiah and Daniel had told the Jews that they would be ruled by God-given emperors until the coming of the Messiah, clearly many Jews did not accept this divine edict fully. Mordecai's refusal to honor the king's demand that Haman be honored is what precipitated the near annihilation of the Jews. The hand of God must be seen in this. If the Jews continued in this kind of rebellion, God would liquidate them.

Second, Israel was a nation of priests, and the book of Jonah was a sharp criticism of Israel's refusal to act as evangelists to the nations. Under Mordecai's sinful advice, Esther concealed her identity. God providentially brought it to pass that she either had to witness or perish. Witness-bearing was to be even more important in the Restoration Era than ever before, because God had spread His people out as the four winds in the midst of the world. The international witness of the Jews laid the foundation for the synagogues, filled with God-fearing gentiles, that we find in the book of Acts.

Third, God had given the Jews a large history full of descriptions of His patterns of action. They were now expected to be mature enough to understand those patterns and identify God's hand at work on their own. Thus, God is not mentioned in Esther, and no miracles take place. Rather, the "miracles" are providential. The devout reader can see God at work in Esther, but unlike the books of Exodus, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, he is not explicitly told exactly what God is doing, and he is not shown miracles. There are miracles in Daniel, but no miracles in Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, a generation later. The book of Esther teaches the Jews that the kind of miraculous works God has done in the past will not happen again, until the Messiah comes. It is not that they are on their own; God forbid! Rather, they are to live righteously and see God's invisible hand operating through non-miraculous means.

Fourth, the association of Amalek with gentile empire is new. Previously, Amalek attacked after the people left

the gentile empire. In Exodus 17, Amalek attacked after the Israelites left Egypt. In 1 Samuel 15, Amalek and Agag attack after Saul and Jonathan have defeated the Philistines. Now, however, the Edomite Amalekite is the agent of the empire. The king does not really know how bad his Amalekite servant is. This sets us up for the relationship between Herod and Rome. Herod was Rome's face in Palestine. While the Romans are portrayed in the Bible as seeking to protect God's people, as in the book of Acts, and in the fact that Pilate sought to spare Jesus, the Herods are murderous. The Herods were Edomites, or in the New Testament spelling, Idumeans. They are, thus, the equivalent of the Amalekites. The book of Esther provides a foretaste of the situation under the Herods, and provides a theological context for understanding Herod the Great's attempt to kill Jesus, Herod's murder of John the Forerunner, and Herod Agrippa I's murder of James and attempted murder of Peter.

Fifth, Esther stands as part of the revelation of the character of the third age. The sins of man in Genesis 3-6 are, first, against the Father in the sanctuary; second, against the Brother in the land; and third, against the matchmaking Spirit in the world (Gen. 6). This last is the sin of intermarriage, the sin pointed to in Ezra-Nehemiah, and the sin of Mordecai when he puts Esther into the beauty contest and tells her to conceal her identity. Moreover, in the first age, that of Moses, the sin was against the first commandment, as we see in Judges. In the second age, the Kingdom age, the sin was against the second commandment, as we see in the "high place" worship in the book of Kings. In the third age, the sin was against the third commandment. The people took God's name upon themselves in vain. Mordecai commits this sin when he rebels against the reasonable demand of the God-appointed ruler, which rebellion is the sin of witchcraft (1 Sam. 15:23), and then claims that he does so because he is a Jew. Rebellious witchcraft leads to destruction, as it did Saul (1 Sam. 28). These two sins are the great temptations before the Jews in the Restoration. They are the context of the gospels. Jesus did not war against false gods or images, but against hypocrisy. When the Jews continued in their witchcraft-rebellion, they were destroyed in AD 70.

While we could probably come up with other aspects of Esther that are important to covenant history, these are enough to make the point that Esther cannot be considered either a work of pious fiction (as liberals do) or as a kind of morality tale (as conservatives do). Esther stands in the middle of the central historical line, the core of history, the history of the priestly people. God is developing that history toward the goal of the Messiah's intervention, and beyond into the history of the Church. If we set Esther to one side, we miss an essential link in that historical chain.

E. The Feast of Purim

One last aspect of Esther should be mentioned, and that is the new feast of Purim. Commentators on the Bible routinely speak of this as a minor feast, but it is not to be regarded as such. Originally, God set up a triad of feasts in the spring (Passover-Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, and Pentecost), and a triad of "feasts" in the fall (Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles). There were no feasts in the winter.

As I have shown in my paper *Behind the Scenes: Orientation in the Book of Revelation* (available for \$12.00 from Biblical Horizons, Box 1096, Niceville, FL 32588), the spring feasts are the feasts of the Bull (priest), and the fall feasts are the feasts of the Lion (king). These are two of the faces of the cherubim, and the only two that applied in the "former days." In the latter days, we add the faces Eagle and Man. The winter feast of Purim is the feast of the Eagle, added in the Restoration Era. The feast of the summer, which comes with the New Covenant, is the feast of the Man. It is the Lord's Supper, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

Commentators routinely set aside the God-given feast of Purim for the man-created Feast of Hanukkah as the winter feast, but the latter feast is a counterfeit. It celebrates the supposed restoration of the Temple by the Maccabees, which restoration was counterfeit. Thus, the true winter feast is Purim. In Revelation, the section of the Bowls is associated with the Eagle, and with the feast of Purim.

For more on this matter, see the extended study paper mentioned above. I have brought up the matter here only

to show that once again, there is a great deal of importance in the book of Esther that is generally overlooked. Passover and Tabernacles were the two original great feasts, and now God adds a third, Purim. Just as the Lord's Supper fulfills Passover and Tabernacles for us, it also fulfills Purim. Failure to take Esther seriously has resulted in a failure to deal fully and properly with Purim.

The giving of the spoils to the Lord (Esther 9) should remind us of the exodus from Egypt. The Jews' destruction of their enemies came on the 14th and 15th days of the 12th month, exactly one month before Passover. During this month, at the time of the original exodus, God was sending plagues on Pharaoh, and the Egyptians were giving gifts (spoils) to the Israelites, which spoils were later made into the Tabernacle. Just as the plagues on Pharaoh made possible the exodus, so the destruction of Haman and the other enemies of the Jews makes possible a new exodus of gold and silver to adorn God's house. Purim celebrates this event.

Since Purim comes in the 12th month, it is quintessentially eschatological. All of God's enemies are destroyed, and because of this the New Year can begin, with Passover in the first month, one month after Purim. As we have seen, Purim celebrates the defeat of the A-Gog-ite and his friends (Ma-Gog). Similarly, the final Purim defeat of Gog and Magog ushers in the final condition of the universe, when God will be all in all (Revelation 20). Before this, as we have just noted, the destruction of Jerusalem and of the two Beasts in AD 70 is the 12th-month Purim that ushers in the New Age of the marriage supper of the Lamb.

(to be continued)

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