

Beauties of the Truth

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They Parted My Garments

John 19:23-24; Psalms 22:18

John chapter 19 opens with a striking change of garments. Jesus had just endured a mock trial. The charge was blasphemy for saying he was the Son of God, that he was a king. Now he endured the contempt of common Roman soldiers. The arraignment was one of ridicule. The soldiers scorned him and braided for him a crown of thorns. And to further dress him like a king, they put on Jesus a purple robe. He was paraded before the people and Pilate asked "shall I crucify your King?" They cried out for his crucifixion. He was marched through the streets to the Place of the Skull, to Golgotha.

There he was hung on the cross and Pilate wrote an inscription in three languages, "Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews." The chief priests asked Pilate to add merely four more words: "He said I am ..." Yes, this would reverse the charge from a fact to an assertion. But Pilate's last recorded words in scripture are: "What I have written, I have written." It was his mark of authority and it could not be changed.

Then (verse 23) "The soldiers therefore, when they had crucified Jesus, took his outer garments and made four parts, a part to every soldier" So there were four soldiers. This is in harmony with Acts 12:4 where Peter was delivered to four squadrons of soldiers, literally, "four sets of four." According to the Matthew, Mark and Luke accounts, one among them was a centurion. He was likely a fifth over the four, because a centurion was one who managed others and was not classed among the common soldiers.

By Roman custom the garments of the executed fell to the possession of the soldiers on duty. It was meager satisfaction for their grim business and numb conscience. One suggestion is the parting of the garments four ways consisted of four customary outer garments including the sandals. However we think the text specifically refers to parting or tearing the outer robe. This was not the purple robe given by Pilate's soldiers, for that had been removed and his own garments were put on him before being led away (Matthew 27:31). This was Jesus' own outer coat (Strong's #2440), and it was somehow torn or cut along the seams. More than any monetary motive, this custom expressed their brutal power over the victim.

Now they came to another garment. Another Greek word is used, it is a tunic (Strong's #5509). This was generally a linen garment worn under the outer clothing next to the skin, like a long shirt, mostly without sleeves and usually reaching to the knees. But this one was a work of great skill, wrought with loving hands. The unusual nature of this one was that it was woven as a unified piece, without a single seam, complete with the aperture for neck and arms. The soldiers had the common sense not to destroy it. But to whom should it go? For this they drew lots and it fell to one who then received the garment. So the only earthly vestments of the Redeemer passed not to his own people but to four Roman soldiers and a centurion.

John adds that this event, entirely a Roman custom, was so that Psalm 22 might be fulfilled. We might end the matter here and say, yes, the prophecy marked Jesus as the Messiah. Or is there a further reason that such a peculiar event should be part of prophecy nearly 1000 years before it took place? To answer this question, we need to observe that both the outer and inner garments leave a trail of symbolism throughout scripture.

Let us look at those outer garments. First we will consider the Hebrew word used in Psalm 22 for the outer garment that is parted. It is Strong's #899. Consulting Strong's Concordance we found this word in the following contexts:

- * The clothing given by Eleazar for Rebecca.
- * Rebecca provided deceiving raiment for Esau before the aging Isaac.
- * Joseph's garment torn from him in Potiphar's house.
- * The vesture Joseph later received from Pharaoh.
- * The fine linen garment for Aaron and his sons with blue, purple and scarlet.
- * The cloth coverings for the tabernacle furniture.
- * David rent his clothes at the death of Saul and of Absalom. (Indeed all rending of garments use this word.)
- * The Lord will put on garments of vengeance for clothing.
- * God hath clothed me with the garments of salvation.
- * Our righteousness is as filthy rags.

All these garments were the **outward clothing as seen by others**. They are the outer garments by which others know us, just as Elijah and John were known by their garments to be prophets. The profession of a doctor or general is first recognized by the attire. But they may be either the good and righteous marks of the person or his evil and bad reputation. So also the corresponding New Testament Greek word #2440 for the garments parted at the cross is found in the following contexts:

- * The new cloth put on an old garment.
- * Jesus was transfigured with white raiment.
- * At his triumphant entry to Jerusalem, people spread their garments in the way.
- * The Pharisees made broad their phylacteries and enlarged the borders of their garments.
- * Let not the one in the field return to take his garments.
- * Sardis had a few names who defiled their garments, but the overcomer is clothed in white raiment.

Here also the **reputation by which a man is known** is symbolized by the robe which the soldiers parted. They tore and divided his righteous reputation. It has mostly been the Roman Church which has torn and misrepresented the outward beauty of the Man Christ Jesus. Now, what of the garment that they would not part, that seamless inner one? First consider the Hebrew uses of word #3830 and #3831 and the related base #3801.

- * The story of Joseph and his coat of many colors.

- * My clothing was sackcloth. I humbled my soul with fasting.
- * The King's daughter is all glorious within, her clothing is of wrought gold.
- * Three Hebrews were put into a furnace with their garments.
- * The Ancient of Days sat, whose garment was white as snow.

Here are the **inner garments of true identity**, whether appreciated outwardly or not. These garments were those worn, so to speak, next to one's skin, on their flesh, where few look. So it is that the bride is **glorious within** and this garment is of divine gold.

The same import is carried in the New Testament Greek word #5509.

- * Jesus' counsel not to take two inner garments for a journey.
- * The masterful inner coats crafted by Dorcas were displayed.
- * Those with spotted garments are pulled from the fire.

In these instances it is the real person, but known truly by the creator who first formed the eye and the ear. This garment is as close as our flesh, as personal as the palms of our hands. It is the garment of the true person. For Jesus, this garment was one complete woven piece. It was not a patch work, not sewn with parts. His true person could not be measured by the consensus of public opinion, or in the synagogues, in the temple halls, nor even in the court of the Sanhedrin.

Now, why should such a prophecy be given concerning the parting of Jesus garments? Why should the lips and pen of David be touched to record such events and symbols and why should John be so prompt to remind us that the event was necessary?

It is similar to the prophecy of **Psalms 34:20** that not a bone of his body would be broken, of which John also takes note in **John 19:36**. But why was it prophesied? It is because bones represent the promises and hopes upon which all flesh is based and hangs. So it was that the bones of the Passover Lamb were not broken. So Jacob arranged for his bones to be taken to Canaan. So the bones of Ezekiel 37 come together according to the promises and hopes of Israel. If there were no such symbolism, there would be no need for the prophecy.

So it is here. The reputation of Jesus, shown in the outer garment, could be torn and misrepresented, but never his absolute righteousness, shown in the singleness of the inner garment. It was predetermined and foretold. "He is despised and rejected of men." Yet "shall my righteous servant justify many" (**Isaiah 53:3, 11**).

There is an instance where Jesus taught that our love should go beyond the requirements of justice. He used both the word for the outer cloak and inner tunic in the same verse. **Matthew 5:40**, "If any man will judge you at the law, and take away thy coat (inner tunic), let him have thy cloak (outer garment) also." Peculiarly, **Luke 6:29** reverses the use of these words. "Him that taketh away thy (outer) cloak forbid not to take thy (inner) coat also."

The lesson was based on **Exodus 22:26-27** and **Deuteronomy 24:10-13**. Under the Law, clothes were accepted as security for debts. If the borrower be poor, the lender should return his coat before evening,

because it was the custom for many to use this for sleeping outside at night. The poor were not to be oppressed.



The Burial of Christ

For one under the law, the lesson is that we should yield more than the minimum which the court requires, and so demonstrate the sincerity of our pledge by exceeding the law. For Jesus, he offered both the outer and absolute requirements of the Law in the ransom as well as the inner heart and life in that aspect of the sin-offering.

SOLDIERS AT THE CROSS

Returning to the cross, the Roman soldiers had the common sense to recognize they held something of rare and complete beauty. If they parted the garment, then it could never be used again and something truly rare would be lost. So they cast lots for it. No one could demand his right to it. They would leave the possession to providence, and it fell to one of the Romans.

What is it that is not parted, something that will be treasured by only a few? Brother Russell says in two articles in 1898 and 1899 (**R2316, R2474**), "The seamless robe appears to symbolize the righteousness of Christ, which can be appropriated only as a whole ... [it] so beautifully represented our Lord's own **personal perfection** ... perhaps a symbol of the wedding garment." This is in accord with the idea that **justification** is as the robe of righteousness, his absolute righteousness, that covers our imperfect flesh. Does anyone have a claim to it? No, it is of divine direction and choice. He is not unrighteous to grant it to one and not to another.

To whom does it come? One could say the single Roman recipient represented the Gentiles and the opportunity for justification that would extend to the ends of the earth. But can we see something more?

Of all the relics claimed by Papacy, including bones, slivers of the cross, the holy grail or silver chalice from the last supper, the shroud of Turin, the scriptures say nothing of such things passing into hands for relic worship. The scriptures record nothing of our Lord's personal possession that passed intact to anyone, except this robe, and that was to a Roman who received it by lot. Was this one of the four soldiers or was it the centurion?

There was another centurion who crossed paths with Jesus (Matthew 8:5, Luke 7:6). He solicited Jesus on behalf of his sick servant. He acknowledged that he was not worthy for Jesus to enter his house and understood Jesus could simply speak the word and the man would be healed. And it was so. When he said "speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed," Jesus replied "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." This event illustrated that not every Roman soldier was cold and brutal.

There is another Roman centurion recorded in the New Testament. That is Cornelius of the Italian Regiment. He is introduced to us in Acts 10. Some years after Jesus' death, Peter found him in Caesarea. He was there along with his family apparently on an extended tour of duty from Rome. Another evidence of the extent of his residence is that he had become deeply devoted to Judaism and was acquainted with the new theology of Christians. Yet he was not accepted by the orthodox community. Nevertheless, his prayers were held in reserve for some time before being answered on that day with Peter. His family seem already to have been acquainted with the message of Jesus, and together they were baptized when Peter came to them. Brother Russell observes that the servant's centurion and Cornelius may have been the same person. 1

THE CENTURION AT THE CROSS

Who, then, was the centurion at the cross with such faith? **Luke 23:47** records the centurion at the cross said, "Certainly this was a righteous man." **Matthew 27:54** and **Mark 15:39** are even more emphatic: "Truly this was the Son of God." This is a profound confession by a Gentile. We could conclude that he is an anonymous character not elsewhere mentioned and that he then disappeared from the pages of history. Or we could assume that he is one of the other mentioned centurions. Otherwise we may deduce that all three centurions may have been the same person. It is not unreasonable to envision Cornelius being called to Jerusalem for the added security during that dark Passover three years before his receiving the spirit. This last option has much appeal.

Brother Russell said of the servant's centurion and Cornelius, "It is not probable that among the Roman soldiers of Palestine there were two centurions of such similarly exceptional character" (**R1922**). So the same may be said concerning the centurion at the cross. Furthermore, if Jesus said of the first centurion, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel," this would be either a second example of such profound faith among the Gentiles or else it is the faith of the same individual.

We cannot be sure, but wouldn't it be interesting if this Cornelius was the same centurion at the cross, the one to whom the lot and the robe fell? If so, it would only be appropriate to extend the symbol of justification to the same one, at the end of the 70 weeks of exclusive favor to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. With him the white robe of justification began to be extended to the Gentiles.

THE GRAVE CLOTHES

Now let us return to that dismal night following the cross. The body of Jesus was removed. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus arranged to quickly and lavishly anoint the body with rare spices and wrap it in linen. These were his last earthly vestments. They were his grave clothes. This wrapping usually consisted of

along continuous band of linen. These linens completely and tightly bound the body. From such bonds Lazarus had to be loosed even though awakened, for otherwise he was completely restricted and constrained.

John (20) records that on the first day of the week he and Peter went to the tomb. Verse 5 says John simply stooped down and looked in, saw the linen clothes, but did not go in. He saw the tomb was empty. But verse 6 says Peter went directly in, followed by John who now entered after Peter. Verse 8 says then he saw and believed. What was the difference? What did John see that convinced him of the resurrection at that very moment?

Verses 6-7 suggest the answer. He saw the grave clothes lying without the body. Then he saw the linen which wrapped the head, still wound in the form of the head. The other grave clothes that had wrapped the rest of the body were also untouched in the rolled form of the body. But there was no body! Some translations suggest the linens were carefully folded as if prepared for storage. But folding could suggest the tomb was intruded and the body taken. Yet this was not the case. The linen clothes lay exactly as they were when swathed, coiled round the body and the head. In John 20:7 the word for "wrapped" is Strong's # 1794 and means "entwined, wound." The Lord had passed out of them, not needing, as Lazarus, to be loosed. It was this sight that first convinced John as he entered the tomb after Peter. This linen was not taken with him, but left as the last token of his earthly apparel for their faith.

We have not seen such a sight, yet we have believed. Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears for they hear. Like the centurion at the cross, we have acknowledged him as the Son of God and have received the single heritage from his earthly life, the robe of justification. What shall we do with it? We shall walk as he walked and take care that it not become spotted with the flesh. Soon it will be transformed into the righteousness of saints in glory.

If we would walk after him, we too will suffer our outer robes of this earthly reputation to be torn and parted. It is part of the sin offering. Yet we now have received, and walk with, his inner robe of his righteousness which covers the sins of our flesh. When our flesh is fully sacrificed, the bride will be given their own righteousness in glory.

Revelation 19:7-8, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

- Jerry Leslie

1 "Impressed by the faith and goodness of this Centurion, so unexpected among Roman soldiers, we were considering that it would be "just like the Lord" to send the gospel to such a noble Gentile soon after the Jewish favor would end, when the doors of divine love and mercy would be opened to Gentiles as well as Israelites. Then the Lord brought to our memory Cornelius, the first Gentile to whom the gospel message was sent (**Acts 10:1-8**). We remembered that he also was a Centurion, and of him also it is recorded that he was `a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always.' It is not probable that among the Roman soldiers of Palestine there were two Centurions of such similarly exceptional character. The residence of the Centurion mentioned by Luke is not stated but that of Cornelius is mentioned: it was Caesarea. Turning to Map No. 10 in a Teacher's Bible we found with no little pleasure that the distance from Capernaum to Caesarea is only about 45 miles, and that Nain is on the way, a little to the East, about 20 miles from Capernaum. We note also the remark of Peter, when preaching Christ and his gospel to Cornelius (**Acts 10:37**), to the effect that Cornelius already knew the word which Jesus had preached throughout all Judea. In our judgment the circumstantial evidences are strong that the Centurion of our lesson was Cornelius. This would also explain why the holy spirit was poured out on Cornelius and his house even while Peter yet spake, and before it is even stated that Cornelius accepted Christ; for apparently he had already done so, as narrated by Luke" (R1922, "The Great Helper").

The Burning Bush

And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I." - Exodus 3:2-4

What is the significance of the burning bush? What lesson did it convey to Moses? What lessons does it convey to the church today? These are the inquiries to be probed in this article.

It has been suggested that Moses' departure from the glories of the Pharaoh's palace to Midian illustrate Jesus leaving the glories of his heavenly home to come to earth at his first advent; and that his return to deliver the enslaved Israelites delineates the events at his second advent. If that be true, then the second forty years of Moses' life cover the period of the Gospel Age.

Few details are given in the Bible of the second forty years of Moses' life. We read of his flight into the wilderness, his employment by Jethro as a shepherd, his marriage to Zipporah, and then his call at the burning bush to deliver the Hebrew people from bondage. The incident at the burning bush (and those that immediately follow), then, mark the final preparations of Moses (Christ) to return to lead the deliverance.

In the passage quoted above there are two reactions one of Moses to seeing the burning bush (he turned aside to investigate) and one by Jehovah (he spoke to Moses when he turned aside - and not before). The implication is clear - if Moses had not turned aside, God would not have addressed him.

The obvious first reason for the turning aside was that it was, in fact, an odd phenomenon to see a bush burning and not being consumed. But was there more? Was there a deeper layer in Moses' thought processes?

MOSES' CONCERNS

From the narrative in the second chapter of Exodus there is no question of Moses' concerns for the bondage and mistreatment of the Hebrew slaves. His slaying the Egyptian taskmaster testifies to the depth of his passions. However, when his kin rejected his attempt to interfere in their quarrel, he knew that he could soon be exposed and subject to the wrath of the king.

It is interesting to note the evaluation of the Apostle Paul as to why Moses took flight. "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible" (**Hebrews 11:27**). It was faith and not fear that sent Moses to Midian. At first glance this seems to be in direct contradiction to **Exodus 2:14, 15**, "And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian? And Moses feared, and said, Surely this thing is known. Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian: and he sat down by a well."

The key is in the Hebrew word *yale*, translated "feared" in **Exodus 2:14**. The word is capable of expressing either fear or reverence (awe). It is understandable why the translators chose our word "fear," though Paul evidently understood it as "reverence" or "awe." The Apostle goes on to explain the deeper reason for the emotion - Moses discerned in his experiences the hand of "him who is invisible." He correctly deduced that it was not yet God's time to deliver Israel because they were not ready to receive him as their deliverer. (It is also possible that Moses' own character needed further training for the formidable task ahead.)

MOSES STILL CONCERNED

It is safe to assume that Moses was no less concerned for his people after forty years in the wilderness. He only felt more powerless to do anything, but he was still waiting for the hand "of him who is invisible" to bring about deliverance. And now, as he keeps his sheep "on the backside of the desert," he sees a sight that brings his concerns to the foreground. He beholds a bush on fire, and still it is not consumed. How powerful an image this must have been to the future leader who never forgot his people - under the fiery persecutions of the Pharaoh, yet not consumed. He walked aside to investigate.

God does not reveal his hand to Moses until his servant takes the first step - "**when** the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush." It was up to Moses to show the same interest in his people which he showed when he slew the Egyptian taskmaster.

But now the reaction was different. Moses no longer felt equal to the task. He pled his loss of eloquence in the Egyptian tongue. He was concerned as to whether his people would accept him. Instead of the zealous, but rash young man desiring to free his people, he had now mellowed and needed to be assured that God himself would be with him to accomplish the task to which he was called.

SECOND ADVENT APPLICATION

On Reprint 3989, Pastor Russell makes this statement concerning the burning bush: "is not the burning bush a good illustration of the experience of Christ and all of his members?" This accords well with the above-noted explanation, for deliverance from Egypt (particularly the deliverance of the firstborns) illustrates the deliverance of "true spiritual Israel" as a precursor to the deliverance of all mankind.

There is still another dimension that fits this picture. As natural Israel went through terrible persecutions in ancient Egypt, so their descendants have gone through similar persecutions all through their Diaspora of the Gospel Age. These descendants will be the first to receive deliverance in the newly-established kingdom of Christ, when Michael, who stands "for the children of thy people" (natural Israel at a later point in history), shall once again fight for Israel as he "fought in the days of old."

A CHRONOLOGICAL APPLICATION

While there are no time prophecies directly in this picture, we do have a clue to a time application. The burning bush was the turning point in Moses' life, when his interest and endeavors were once again centered on the goal of his youth - to free the Israelite slaves.

From this point on the Exodus narrative deals with the preparatory acts for his return - his lessons from the "three signs" to prove to both the Israelites and the Egyptians that it was time for the slave's release from bondage (**Exodus 3:7-4:17**); the obtaining of Jethro's blessing for the mission (**Exodus 4:18, 19**); his journey (**Exodus 4:20-23**); the circumcision of his children by Zipporah (**Exodus 4:24-26**); his linking up with Aaron at the "mount of God" (**Exodus 4:27, 28**) and his arrival, assembling of the elders of Israel and convincing of all the Israelites that it was now time for deliverance (**Exodus 4:29-31**).

In other words, the events between the burning bush and the final arrival in Egypt were the final preparation for his future work. This calls to mind the expression in **Nahum 2:3** concerning the "day of his preparation" - a period often applied, and we think correctly, to the period from 1799 to the establishment of Christ's kingdom.

It is worthy to note that the fortunes of natural Israel took a sharp turn for the better in the latter days of Napoleon. In 1799 Napoleon expressed his desire (which was never put into reality) to proclaim Palestine as a new homeland for the Jews. In 1801, a concordat between Napoleon and Pope Plus VII, limiting the status of Jews in Europe, was abolished. Jewish rabbis as well as Protestant pastors began receiving the same stipends from the French government as those given to the Catholic clergy. In 1812 the Jews of Prussia were granted full civil rights.

During the same time period the developments in Christianity were preparing the way for the harvest. New truths were coming to light. Depthful research resulted in numerous Bible study tools, such as concordances, lexicons, commentaries, and Bible dictionaries. All of these were preparatory to the release of God's true people from their antitypical Babylonian captivity.

The burning bush, therefore, marks the beginning of the transition time from ages of bondage into the ultimate liberties promised by the incoming Messianic Kingdom.

- *Carl Hagensick*

Lessons from Esther

The fact that the story of Esther was recorded in the Bible indicates that there are lessons to be learned from it. That is the purpose of all scripture. Let us consider some of the many lessons in this beautiful story of God's providential care for his people.

The name Ahasuerus means Lion-King. Jesus Christ is designated "The lion of the tribe of Judah" (**Revelation 5:5**). Ahasuerus ruled all nations to the uttermost parts of the earth with autocratic power, subduing all opposition. The world was at his feet. Of Jesus it is written: "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession" (**Psalms 2:8, 9**). "He shall rule them with a rod of iron. As the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers" (**Revelation 2:27**). "He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet" (**1 Corinthians 15:25**).

The name Vashti means Beautiful. The king called for her to appear before him in her royal robe and golden crown. She lost a great opportunity when she refused to obey the king. From this we learn that if the Lord invites anyone to put on the royal robe of Christ's righteousness, wear the golden crown of the divine nature, and appear before the great king in beauty of character as his bride, such an invitation should not be refused. It should be considered a great honor and be obeyed eagerly and promptly. Those contemplating consecration should think about this.

The decision regarding Vashti was, "Let the king give her royal estate unto her neighbor who is better than she." This reminds us of the case of King Saul who also was disobedient. The decision regarding him was strikingly similar in its words: "And Samuel said unto him, The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine, who is better than thou" (**1 Samuel 15:28**).

Vashti and Saul both lost their crowns. If not obedient, any one of us can be replaced and our crown assigned to a better person. Jesus said, "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown" (**Revelation 3:11**). There is a very sobering thought here. We can lose our crowns by not holding fast to that which we have, by being disobedient to the truth. This test is even now upon the church.

We read, "The king's daughter is all glorious within" (**Psalms 45:13**). Vashti was very beautiful, but only on the outside. She did not exhibit the inner beauty that is pleasing to the Lord. "Your beauty should not be dependent on an elaborate arrangement of the hair, or in the wearing of jewelry or fine clothes; but on the

inner personality, the unfading loveliness of a meek and gentle spirit, a thing very precious in the eyes of God" (**1 Peter 3:3, 4**, Weymouth). We want to be beautiful and precious in God's sight who looks not on the outward appearance, but on the heart.

The rejection of Vashti from the chief place in the kingdom of Ahasuerus suggests the rejection of natural Israel from the chief place of favor by our Lord. Although making a beautiful outward profession, their hearts were evil. Jesus told their leaders, "Ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within, full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also, outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity" (**Matthew 23:27, 28**).

THE SEARCH FOR A QUEEN

As a nation they were disobedient to the heavenly vision. They missed the opportunity to become Spiritual Israel, the Bride of Christ. They rejected Christ and he rejected them. Now we begin to appreciate the significance of the divorce of Vashti and the command of Ahasuerus to call for beautiful virgins from all over the world that he might select a bride from among them. This is the call of the church, the Bride of Christ, the high calling. They come "out of every kindred, and tongue, and people and nation" (**Revelation 5:9**). Thus we read, "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (**2 Chronicles 16:9**).

The virgins had a year of preparation and training before they were ushered into the king's presence. During this time, everything they needed to make them attractive was furnished them. They were given special food from the king's own table and perfume to anoint themselves. They were assigned maids to serve them. This is a good description of the way we are prepared for our high calling. We are in the School of Christ and are given sufficient time to make ourselves ready. We are given everything we need for our spiritual welfare to prepare us for the kingdom. We are abundantly fed with spiritual food from the table of our returned Lord. We are "thoroughly furnished and fitted for every good work" (**2 Timothy 3:17**). We have the most faithful and efficient servants in the world - guardian angels and ministering spirits.



Queen Vashti Refusing the Command of Ahasuerus

Esther left the house of her father and clothed in her finest apparel, she entered into the king's palace. Her beauty completely captivated the king's heart and he placed the crown of gold upon her head. **Psalms 45** describes Esther's experience which prefigured ours. "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear. Forget also thine own people, and thy father's house. So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty; for he is thy Lord, and worship thou him. The king's daughter is all glorious within, her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework. The virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought. They shall enter into the king's palace" (**Psalms 45:10-15**).

When we consecrate we leave our father's house, the house of Adam, and we leave the things of this world including human relationships, hopes, aims and ambitions. Our heavenly king greatly desires to see beauty of character in us and gives us every facility to develop it. We have needlework to do. We painstakingly add to our robes the beautiful adornments of the Christian graces. Psalm 110:3 refers to these as "beauties of holiness." Then when we finally enter the king's presence, our clothing is of wrought gold, symbolic of the divine nature, and we receive the golden crown, the crown of life.

In the story of Esther, the virgins who failed to become the bride were not sent home, but were given a secondary place in the king's household. These represent the Great Company, referred to as "the virgins, her companions," elsewhere termed "foolish virgins." They will attain the spirit nature and serve before the throne. There will indeed be "gladness and rejoicing" when the great king has selected his bride and the heavenly wedding takes place. "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready" (**Revelation 19:7**).

After Esther was crowned there was great rejoicing by all the people of the kingdom and we read that "the king made a great feast." And in this mountain [kingdom] shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things; a feast of wines on the lees; of fat things full of marrow; of wines on the lees well refined" (Isaiah 25:6). This refers to the whole world, feasting upon the rich blessings of the Millennial kingdom.

HAMAN PICTURES SATAN

Haman and Satan have many characteristics in common. Haman was inordinately proud and ambitious. Of Satan it is written: "Thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am a God, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas. Yet thou art a man [mortal] and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God" (**Ezekiel 28:2**). "Thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the North; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High" (**Isaiah 14:13, 14**).

As Haman loved to be bowed and knelt to, we read that Satan said to Jesus "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me" (**Matthew 4:9**). Every faithful Christian will shun Satan's characteristic of pride and desire to dominate. We must rather cultivate the mind of Christ, of whom it is written "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not meditate a usurpation to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (**Php 2:5-8**).

As Haman hated the Jews and sought to exterminate them, Satan has always hated the Seed of Promise which God told him was destined to bruise his head. Identifying this seed with Israel, he has always tried to destroy that nation. It was he who inspired Hitler to try to exterminate the Jews of the world, much like Haman. It was he who has surrounded modern Israel with a superior force of bitter enemies, sworn to utterly destroy them. It is he who will propel the nation of the north against Israel in the final great struggle. Just as

under Haman's order those who killed the Jews might take their property as a spoil, we read of the attack from the north that they will come "To take a spoil, and to take a prey" (Ezekiel 38:12). Satan has always been the implacable foe of Spiritual Israel also, from the head, Christ Jesus, to the feet members this side the veil. Satan is our Haman.

When Mordecai told queen Esther to see the king about Haman's wicked plot, she at first hesitated to risk her life to do it. Mordecai's reply was, "If you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter ... and who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" What a tremendous faith Mordecai thus exhibited! By a law of the Medes and Persians, which could not be changed, the Jews were to be slaughtered. Yet Mordecai was positive that they would be delivered, if not by Esther's intervention, then by some other means. He encouraged Esther to use her position in the kingdom to accomplish that which he was sure would be done in any event. Esther's reply was, "I will go to the king ... and if I perish, I perish."

Bro. Russell comments on this: "There is a beautiful lesson of faith here that should appeal to all of the Spiritual Israelites. Whatever we have, whatever positions we occupy of influence, or power, or wealth or confidence in the esteem of others, is so much of a stewardship granted to us by the Lord, and respecting which we should expect to give an account. And if the account would be rendered with joy, we must be faithful even to the risking of our lives in the interests of the Lord's people, the Lord's cause. Let us lay this feature of Esther's experience to heart, that we may draw valuable lessons therefrom, helpful to us in the spiritual way. The suggestion that she had not come to a place of honor and privilege by accident, but that the Lord had overruled in the matter, is one that should appeal to all Israelites indeed. Whatever we have is of the Lord's providence. Let us use it faithfully, and as wisely as possible, for him and his. Thus our own blessings and joys will be increased as well as our favor with the Lord" (Reprints, page **3657 203657**).

When Esther entered the king's presence unbidden, she was reconciled to death. But what a sudden change occurred! One moment she was fearing for her life, the next she was offered half the world! How quickly the Lord can change our prospects! The things we fear the most often turn out to be our greatest blessings. As the poet has well expressed it, "Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; the clouds ye so much dread, are big with mercy, and shall break in blessings on your head."

Let us consider two seeming coincidences in the account. On the same night in which Haman built a gallows eighty feet high upon which to hang Mordecai, the king couldn't sleep. He called for the royal record book and was reminded that Mordecai had saved his life. At the very moment when Haman entered the outer court of the king to ask permission to hang Mordecai, the king had decided to honor Mordecai. He asked Haman what should be done to "the man whom the king delighted to honor?" Do you think that these events were merely coincidental? You know they were not! This was the finger of God. We have the very same supervision of our affairs. Our heavenly Father can control and maneuver every principality and power with the greatest of ease for our benefit. To a child of God, nothing happens by accident. Every event of life is supervised for one's highest welfare. What comfort and assurance this should give our hearts!

In exposing Haman's wicked plot, Esther told the king "I and my race have been sold to be massacred." Similarly, the whole human race was sold into sin and death by Satan's wicked plot (**Romans 7:14**). But as Mordecai wrote a new law in the king's name which counteracted and nullified Haman's wicked law of death, there will be a New Law Covenant inaugurated with the House of Israel which will abolish death and bring life to all the world of mankind. As Mordecai was raised up to power in the kingdom and administered that new law of the Medes and Persians, the Ancient Worthies will be raised up to administer the New Covenant during the Messianic kingdom. Just as Haman was hanged upon gallows he had erected for the innocent, Satan will himself receive the penalty of death which he sought to inflict upon Adam and his race.

In the account Haman's vast fortune was given to Esther who turned it over to Mordecai to administer for her. This pictures the transfer of Satan's usurped dominion of the world to the church reigning with Christ, who will be visibly represented by the Ancient Worthies. This will be the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy, "And the kingdom and dominion and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him" (**Daniel 7:27**).

Finally Haman's ten sons were executed. This pictures the complete destruction at the end of the Millennium of all Satan's family - all the incorrigibly wicked.

The story of Esther could appropriately end with the phrase "And they lived happily ever after." This is how the beautiful story of the Divine Plan of Salvation ends: "The whole human family will live happily forever after!"

-Robert Seklemian