

# COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

A General Conference Church Ministries Publication October-December 1987

## The Tale of Two Women



# Karen Meyerle makes caring easy for her patients.



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# THE TALE OF TWO WOMEN

## Studies in Ruth and Esther

### COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

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\* Based on inpatient, outpatient and Emergency Department figures.

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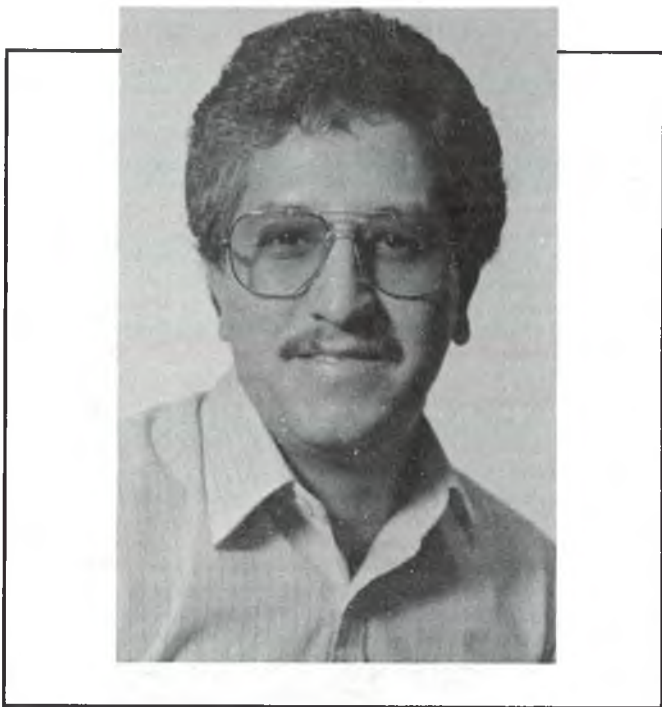
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## THIS QUARTER'S ARTIST

This *Collegiate Quarterly* marks the first work by artist Urias Chagas in pencil — “at least since my doodling days in school.” His drawings were done in soft pencil on textured paper.

Chagas is a graphic and layout artist at Southwestern Adventist College in Keene, Texas. He holds the bachelor of arts degree in theology from Southwestern.

Born in São Paulo, Brazil, he attended art school in that city and then studied at the Instituto Adventista de Ensino, also in São Paulo. He worked 4 years for the Brazilian Publishing House, Casa Publicadora Brasileira, as a graphic artist before coming to the United States in 1980.

A month after graduation from Southwestern, he married Beth Vollmer, Medicare/Medicaid account representative at Huguley Memorial Hospital in Fort Worth. By the time this quarterly is printed, they will be parents for the first time.

Chagas, who speaks Portuguese, English, and Spanish, is head elder of the Brazilian church in Keene.



# INTRODUCTION TO RUTH AND ESTHER

by Karen Flowers

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair. We had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

So begins Charles Dickens' classic *A Tale of Two Cities*, which could as well have been written to introduce the two books that we open this quarter, tales of two women—Esther and Ruth.

They were the worst of times.

Events in the space of a decade have eroded away everything that gave meaning to the life of one woman. She has faced economic hardship and famine. She has been forced to move to a foreign land with a strange language and customs. She has been widowed, been a single parent, borne the agony of seeing her sons marry out of her religion. She has known the grief of losing not only a husband but also both of her sons, leaving her without heirs, without support. She is aging, and her options are closing up. Now she feels compelled once again to uproot herself and return to her homeland, where she faces the prospect of having to rehearse the whole sad tale to the townsfolk. And to make matters worse, there is this one, her daughter-in-law, who dogs her footsteps, declaring, "Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God" (Ruth 1:16, NASB). What a God He has turned out to be!

For the woman in the second drama, life has been a mixed bag, as well. Her parents are dead, yet she is not without family. Through a fairytale series of events she has moved from peasantry to royalty at a speed that has left her with much catching up to do. As this curtain rises, one she loves, a faithful, loyal servant of both God and the state, is maligned by a clever, conniving, egotistical, power-hungry villain. Now her race is threatened with extinction. All eyes rest upon her.

But they were also the best of times.

Tales of two women, yes, but much more, stories of one God who is mighty to save. As the dramas unfold, seek for yourself a saving knowledge of the One who is "near of kin unto us" (2:20, KJV), the One who hears the cries even of widows and orphans and who alone can bring restoration and hope in the midst of despair.

Lesson 1, September 27—October 3

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# Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives

"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'" (Isaiah 6:8, NIV).





# The Essence of Bravery

by Jill Doster

His name was Steve, and I thought he was wonderful. It wasn't just because he was so good looking, although that undoubtedly added a little something to his appeal. It was mostly because he was simply so nice. All the time. To everybody. Including me—a self-conscious, first-time-away-from-home college freshman. I never got to know him extremely well, but we did become friendly enough for me to comment once on his apparently never-failing good humor and friendliness. He just smiled and said, "Well, I guess you've got to praise the Lord in any way you can."

He was a senior that year and the following year he went as a student missionary—to Japan, I think. I never saw him again, but a couple of years later I began coming across an occasional article written by him in *Insight*. I always read them with the special interest I reserve for something written by someone I know, and I found myself wondering whether he had changed much. Something tells me he

hasn't. I hope not.

If he reads this, chances are he won't recognize himself or even remember who I am—I said we weren't close—and I'm almost positive he won't remember what he said to me about praising the Lord that day. But that doesn't change the effect his comment had on me. It has been etched on my memory for more than ten years, and I suspect it will stay with me for at least ten more. I remember it when I sit in church, listening to special music, wishing I could sing like that; I recall it when I feel inadequate because I'm not giving Bible studies to my classmates in graduate school; it pops into my mind when a student comes into the office to talk just because he or she is feeling lonely—I *am* praising the Lord in any way I can.

My friend Steve may not have performed the grand deeds of a brave Daniel, a valiant David, or a courageous Esther. But I'm not so sure he is so different from them. After all, what is bravery besides doing what you can?

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture:  
Books of Ruth  
and Esther

---

Jill Doster is assistant professor of English at Kettering College of Medical Arts, Kettering, Ohio.

# Examples of God Using People

by Robert L. Dunn

**LOGOS** Theme: God looks for and uses people of all kinds who will take hold of the task He has in mind for them in the time and place where they live.

## 1. God Uses People Who Have External Resources—the Story of the Woman of Shunem (read 2 Kings 4:8-37)

*"One day Elisha went to Shunem. And a well-to-do woman was there, who urged him to stay for a meal. So whenever he came by, he stopped there to eat" (verse 8, NIV).*

Elisha passed frequently through the village of Shunem on his many journeys as pastor-prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel (852-798 B.C.). A woman, with a comfortable home and all her needs well provided for, made it a habit to share her possessions with others. She was not one to be preoccupied with a busy life and nice home. To Elisha was extended the hospitality of her comfortable home, and he looked forward to the pleasant hours of rest and relaxation that were provided by this sensitive and generous hostess. His work as a prophet of God was made more pleasant and lighter because of this woman's friendship. God can use people who unselfishly make available their personal resources to meet the needs of those with whom they come into contact.

*What are my resources? Can God use me to meet the needs of the people with whom I come into contact? What are some of the ways I can meet the needs of people?*

## 2. God Uses People Who Have Internal Resources—the Story of Mary (read Luke 1:26-38)

*"The angel went to her and said, 'Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you. . . . You will be with child and give birth to a son. . . .'" "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. 'May it be to me as you have said.' Then the angel left her" (verses 28-31, 38, NIV).*

Luke presents the narrative of the angel's visit to Mary from Mary's viewpoint, giving us the impression that he probably heard her tell this story. Mary was to be highly honored as the human channel through which heaven would send God into the world. Likely an orphan, reared by relatives, Mary appears to have been chosen because of her closeness to the divine ideal. Because of her personal strengths, she was a safe choice in whom heaven could invest its greatest wealth. "Mary seems to have been not only a virtuous and devout maiden but one of remarkable intelligence as well. Not only had she an unusual acquaintance with the Scriptures, but she also reflected upon the meaning of the various experiences that life brought her (see Luke 2:19, 51)."\*

Mary's response to her special calling indicates that she was willing to be used as God's instrument. "I am the Lord's servant, . . . May it be to me as you have said" (verse 38, NIV).

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Robert L. Dunn is chaplain and associate professor of religion at Kettering College of Medical Arts, Kettering, Ohio.

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*Which of Mary's attributes were innate and which were developed? How does one develop virtues? What similarities do you find between Mary and the woman of Shunem? What qualities must a person possess to be a usable instrument in God's hands?*

### **3. God Uses People Who Live in Adversity—the Story of Ruth**

*"I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before" (Ruth 2:11, NIV).*

Ruth was well acquainted with adversity: Ten years of childless marriage, a widow among widows, a foreigner in a hostile place, a frightening food shortage, a depressed and widowed mother-in-law to support, no income, the humiliation of needing welfare, a struggle for survival that necessitated a 12-15-hour day of hard manual labor that provided barely enough to eat, threat of male intimidation and abuse, and roots that can be traced back to an incestuous relationship between a drunken father and a conniving daughter in a cave (see Gen. 19:30-37). There was not much Ruth could do with some of the problems she inherited.

But her choice to cleave to Naomi and her God without thought for her own future, even though she had a lot of life to live yet, is one of history's most superb stories of love, devotion, faith, piety, humility, and industry. Because of Ruth's choice and perseverance once the choice was made, God chose her to be a part of the line and ancestry of the royal family of David and Jesus Christ. Read also Esther 3:12—4:3, 9:1-5.

*What similarities are there between Mary and Ruth? What makes the story of Ruth extraordinary?*

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\* SDA Bible  
Commentary,  
vol. 5, p. 681.

# The Chance to Serve Depends Upon the Choice to Surrender

by Robert L. Dunn

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Isaiah 6:8

Words of wisdom from the Spirit of Prophecy point out some important and practical ideas on why God needs ordinary people to be of service to Him by choosing to be influenced by His Spirit. Growth and opportunity depend on it. To be connected with God can produce extraordinary results.

Consider the following excerpts:

"Those who occupy responsible positions should so educate and discipline themselves that all within the sphere of their influence may see what man can be, and what he can do, when connected with the God of wisdom and power."<sup>1</sup>

"With many, the more responsible the position they occupy, the better pleased are they with themselves; and they cherish the idea that the position gives character to the man. Few realize that they have a constant work before them to develop forbearance, sympathy, charity, conscientiousness, and fidelity—traits of character indispensable to those who occupy positions of responsibility."<sup>2</sup>

"The heavenly universe is waiting for consecrated channels, through which God can communicate with His people, and through them with the world. God will work through a consecrated, self-denying church, and He will reveal His Spirit in a visible and glorious manner, especially in this time, when Satan is working in a masterly manner to deceive the souls of both ministers and people."<sup>3</sup>

"The life of a true Christian is one continuous round of service. 'We are laborers together with God.' Every day brings to the one in God's service duties proportionate to his powers. His usefulness increases as, under the guidance of a supreme Power, he performs these duties. The fulfillment of one duty makes us better prepared to take up another. Those who have a true sense of what is to be done will place themselves in the direct light of the word of God, in union with His other working forces."<sup>4</sup>

"Those who make the most of their privileges and opportunities will be, in the Bible sense, talented and educated men [and women]; not learned merely, but educated, in mind, in manners, in deportment. They will be refined, tender, pitiful, affectionate."<sup>5</sup>

1. *Testimonies*,

vol. 4, p. 549.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 548.

3. *Selected Messages*,

vol. 1, p. 117.

4. *Testimonies*,

vol. 9, pp. 220, 221.

5. *Testimonies*,

vol. 4, p. 548.

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Robert L. Dunn is chaplain and associate professor of religion at Kettering College of Medical Arts, Kettering, Ohio.



# Called to Save

by Dan Stevens

To the casual observer, the stories of Ruth and Esther seem about as opposite as they can be. Ruth is a heathen Moabite who forsakes her family to marry a poor Jew. Esther, however, is a beautiful Jewish orphan who marries a rich and powerful heathen, the king of Persia. Their circumstances and life-styles were completely different.

Yet a deeper study reveals that these two women had much in common:

## 1. Both women lived during a crisis point for their people.

Ruth came to Judah during the time of the judges, when "every man did what was right in his own eyes" and the Jews' unfaithfulness was being disciplined by God through the harassment of the surrounding nations. Esther lived during the postexilic period, when the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem were frustrated in their rebuilding program.

## 2. Both experienced triumph after trouble.

Esther had lost her parents, but found support from her uncle Mordecai, who introduced her into the Persian court. Ruth became a widow when Mahlon died, but she found comfort from her mother-in-law, Naomi, who guided her in Israelite customs and found her a responsible husband in Boaz.

## 3. The future of their family and nation depended upon their taking a personal risk.

Ruth married Boaz and thus ensured the continuance of Mahlon's line and property. Esther faced the possibility of death for displeasing Xerxes when she came in unannounced, but her action secured the salvation of her people.

## 4. God rewarded their faithfulness.

Ruth became the great-grandmother of David and an ancestor of Jesus. Esther not only saved the Jews from extermination but restored them to royal favor and prepared the way for the labors of Ezra and Nehemiah some years later under the decree of Xerxes' son and successor, Artaxerxes I, in 457 B.C., which brought complete restoration to Jerusalem.

## REACT

Compare the statements of commitment made by Ruth (1:16, 17) and those made by Esther (4:16). What do they hold in common?

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Overview of  
the books of  
Esther and Ruth

---

Dan Stevens is an associate pastor in the Kettering Seventh-day Adventist Church, Kettering, Ohio.

# What Makes a Person Extraordinary?

by Tom Robbins

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**Matthew**  
**5:47, 48, NEB**

The title this week is "Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives." What makes a person extraordinary? Is it someone who rises to an occasion or a challenge? Is it someone who demonstrates character and moral integrity over a long period of time? Or is it someone who departs from the customs and norms of the day to do the right thing?

In hindsight heroes and heroines enjoy unanimous popularity, but in their own time they are often people who break the rules, customs, or norms in a culture. We look back at Ruth and Esther as if they did everything right, but in their own time, they surely were embroiled in conflict. Both of these women must have agonized over their feelings, the decisions they faced, and the possible consequences. The actions of Ruth were bold, particularly in relation to her quiet personality, and Esther's behavior could easily be interpreted as brash. Surely their friends and acquaintances were quick to offer their judgments of these ladies and their motives, much the way we do in regard to those around us. Phrases such as "Who does she think she is?" "You know what her problem really is?" "You must think you are really hot stuff" and "She had better straighten up and fly right" are not unique to our culture. The Hebrews had equivalent expressions, and I'm sure that many people applied them to Ruth and Esther.

Perhaps the contemporary equivalent of Ruth would be a Vietnamese woman (Ruth was foreign-born of a long-time-Hebrew-enemy nation) who came to the United States after being married to a young man from your church who was killed later in an auto accident. She is very quiet, speaks very little English, and has two children who always dress a little odd. Might this woman be the heroine that Ruth was? How can we best exemplify Christian behavior to this woman?

The contemporary equivalent of Esther might be a Seventh-day Adventist young lady who wins the Miss America pageant and then marries a non-Adventist high-ranking official, like the Governor of California or New York. She then uses her prominence to influence legislation regarding Sunday laws or some religious-liberty issue. Would this lady generate universal approval from Seventh-day Adventist church leaders and the membership at large? Or would she be very controversial? Would there be some who would question her motives and her relationship to the church?

Perhaps, since we don't have the benefit of hindsight, clearly to separate the extraordinary people from the ordinary, the heroes and heroines from the fools, the odd from the normal, the rule breakers from the rule makers, perhaps each of these situations is a challenge for us to be extraordinary and heroic in our love and acceptance of others. As Christ said, "If you greet only your brothers, what is there extraordinary about that? Even the heathen do as much. There must be no limit to your goodness, as your heavenly Father's goodness knows no bounds" (Matt. 5:47, 48, NEB).

---

**Tom Robbins is associate professor of English at Kettering College of Medical Arts, Kettering, Ohio.**

# Call to the Ministry, What Then?

by Dick Tibbits

Another letter arrives today: "I regret to inform you that, owing to many complicated factors, we cannot consider you for a position within this conference. However, do not be discouraged, for the Lord has a place for you if He has called you." Increasing numbers of men and women within our church today are finding themselves as victims of "many and complicated factors." Seminary students graduate with nowhere to go. Women train and prepare for ministry while facing roadblocks in their paths. College students are being told that they had better have a second major other than theology.

What do these waiting pastors experience? They have received a call to ministry and all that goes with it: i.e., a sense of identity, value, direction, and commitment. They respond with eagerness to fulfill that call within the church, only to face rejection. One such individual explained it to me this way. "I am angry that I have put so much time and energy into this only to be told that I am not wanted. How can it be? I experienced a calling. My pastor affirmed it and encouraged me. My teachers directed me in solidifying that call, and now I am told to look elsewhere. Have you ever looked through the help-wanted ads for jobs requiring ministerial skills? I feel my call is legitimate, but if the church won't recognize it, what does that mean? 'Here am I Lord! Oh, please, I beg you, send me!'"

How does the church respond to these called individuals? Sometimes it appears as though the call is legitimate only if it is recognized by the church, vis a vis, ordination and employment. Is this the only way calls are validated in today's lesson? Of course not. Maybe it is time for the church to look at ways of validating the call even when economics dictate against employment opportunities. There should be a process and place for endorsing the call to ministry of men and women so that they can find employment outside the church while serving as a minister representing the church.

There are forms of ministry outside church employment in which these called individuals could exercise their ministry with church endorsement. The church has been doing this for years in the various branches of military service. Other opportunities exist as chaplains in thousands of hospitals across the country. Pastoral-counseling centers that are springing up by the hundreds need ministers to give focused personal ministry. Industries are recognizing the cost effectiveness of industrial chaplains with human-relations skills. Retirement centers are looking for chaplains to create community and caring.

I believe it is time the church takes seriously the calling received by individuals within its ranks and, even though it cannot employ them, the church can still validate their calling through endorsement and ordination and facilitate employment outside the church structure. Thus we can truly become the salt of the world as the ministerial presence of our church is taken to places where it is not normally found.

---

Dick Tibbits is pastoral counselor and clinical pastoral education supervisor at Kettering Medical Center, Kettering, Ohio.

## OPINION

Key text:  
Isaiah 6:8

# Famine, Flight, Fidelity

"But Ruth replied, 'Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God' " (Ruth 1:16, NIV).





# Act I— Tragedy and Love

by Ralph Gifford

I recently made out my last will and testament. Needless to say, I did not request one of my brothers to take my wife and provide male offspring for me in the event of my untimely death. Fortunately I already have male offspring. My name will be carried on. (My oldest boy has the designation IV after his name.)

Neither is it likely that we'll be moving from our homestead in the foreseeable future, barring a famine or enemy occupation.

But famine, quite likely brought on by enemy occupation, is exactly what led Elimelech to leave the family homestead and move to Moab. And thus began a drama that would become a favorite in Biblical literature.

This drama has the elements of a great play: tragedy, exile, loyalty, romance, confrontation, and a happy ending. This week's lesson is Act I. In it, Elimelech leaves the land of his inheritance. Some commentators portray this action as a lack of faith, because to leave one's land was to leave one's

share in the coming glory of the Messiah.\*

Shortly after moving to Moab, Elimelech dies, leaving Naomi with her two sons. As the act unfolds we see that in spite of the Biblical injunction against associating with the Moabites (Deut. 23:3), Naomi's two sons marry Moabite women. Apparently Naomi's love extends beyond cultural boundaries, because we see that, as her sons die and she is returning to Bethlehem, her daughters-in-law cling to her.

Act I is essentially the story of Naomi. We watch her go through great tragedy. We hear her blame God. Yet her love remains strong, inspiring Ruth to leave home, family, and culture, to say, "Where you go, I will go, wherever you live, I will live. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God" (Ruth 1:14, Jerusalem).

As we study this week's lesson our challenge is to understand how Naomi could continue to love in the face of disaster.

## INTRO- DUCTION

Scripture:  
Ruth 1:1-18

---

Ralph Gifford is employed as a sales engineer in Massachusetts.

\* S. G. DeGraal, *Promise and Deliverance* (St. Catharines, Ontario: Paideia Press, 1978), vol. 2, p. 58.

# Ordinary People/ Extraordinary Providence

by Lawrence T. Geraty

**LOGOS** Theme: Even when struggling in the midst of tragedy and disaster, the lives of God's people demonstrate something that captivates those around them.

## 1. The Story's Setting (read Ruth 1:1)

*"In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons" (Ruth 1:1, RSV).*

From a literary point of view, the little book of Ruth is a masterpiece. It is a carefully crafted short story that has more than entertainment value. It also traces the ancestry of Israel's King David back into the period of the judges to a foreign woman (imagine that!). Showing that God's grace is broad enough to include those "outside the fold," it shows how ultimately such ones are brought into the community of faith, often to serve as examples in traumatic times.

This "once-upon-a-time" introduction to the story puts it in the period of the judges (prior to the tenth century B.C.) when "every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25, RSV). Famine had come to the Judean hills around Bethlehem, and a family of four moved due east, having to go below sea level to cross the great Rift Valley through which flowed the Jordan River into the Dead Sea, up to the highland Plateau of Moab, between the Dead Sea and the great desert to its east—an area that still serves as a bread basket for the Arabs east of the Jordan today. (It is worth noting that conditions on the two sides of the Jordan can and do vary appreciably.) This sojourn reminds us of similar events in the times of Abraham (Gen. 12:10), Isaac (26:1) and Jacob (42:1-5). In each case famine forced them out of their home and into a foreign land where problems awaited them.

*Were famines such as these a judgment of God on His people? (cf. Ruth 1:6, as well as Leviticus 26:14-16; Deuteronomy 11:16, 17).*

## 2. Ten Years of Tragedy (read Ruth 1:2-5)

*"The woman was bereft of her two sons and her husband" (Ruth 1:5, RSV).*

The key characters of the story are introduced by name at this point. To the Semitic mind, names always have special relevance. Here again they are significant in the light of the events that take place:

*Elimelech* means "My God is king" or "The King (Yahweh) is my God"—a name, remember, from the pre-monarchical period of the judges.

*Naomi* means "my sweetness/pleasantness"—a name she later changes to the opposite meaning (cf. 1:20).

*Mahlon* probably means "weakness/sickness," related to the verb "to be sick."

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*Chilion* is generally regarded as "wasting/pining," though perhaps "destruction."

*Orpah* is taken to mean "stubborn" or "back of the neck."

*Ruth* may possibly mean "friendship or friend," in some way related to the verb "to be associating with someone," or "satiating" if related to the verb "to drink one's fill."

Thus the meaning of the names contain the whole story in a nutshell. Within a decade, not only the father died but after their marriage the two sons died, as well, leaving Naomi a widow with only her two daughters-in-law. Evidently Naomi, like the others, lived up to her name, given the fondness of her daughters-in-law for her.

*Does what we are called (whether by name or description) have an influence on who we are, how we act, and what we do?*

### **3. The Decision to Return Home (read Ruth 1:6, 7)**

*"She had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food" (Ruth 1:6, RSV).*

The reasons that made Naomi's sojourn in Moab seem like the right thing to do disappeared. The famine in Judah was gone. Her immediate family who brought meaning to her life—not to mention who put bread on her table—had gone the way of all flesh. Very likely widows in Moab received considerably less consideration than they did in Judah, so Naomi's thoughts turned toward home, where Israel's God "executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing" (Deut. 10:18, RSV; cf. Ex. 22:22; Deut. 24:17; Jer. 7:6).

*Do divine will and human action go hand in hand? To be specific, do widows and such have a direct pipeline from heaven or does heaven depend on sensitive intermediaries? (cf. James 1:27). Are such ones in conditions that make them more susceptible to the good news of God's love?*

### **4. A Test of Devotion (read Ruth 1:8-14)**

*"Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? . . . For it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me" (Ruth 1:11-13).*

As Naomi began her 75-mile homeward journey from Moab to Bethlehem, accompanied by her daughters-in-law, she realized Judah might not hold as much promise for them as it did for her. She encouraged them to return to their "mother's house" (Ruth 1:8, Jerusalem). (It is interesting to speculate why, in the Near Eastern context, it is not the expected "father's house.") At first, both girls would not even consider separation from Naomi. Evidently there was something special about "My Sweetness/Pleasantness" that captivated her daughters-in-law. But Naomi argued that she was too old to bear more sons for them even if she got another husband.

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Furthermore, these Moabite girls might not have been too welcome in Judah (cf. Deut. 23:3-6) even though Israelites and Moabites were distant relatives (cf. Gen. 19:30-38). Evidently Orpah agreed, because though the leave-taking was difficult, she did it.

It is noteworthy that Naomi reflected on her experience from a theological point of view (Ruth 1:6, 13, 21). She saw the hand of God as the explanation for what was happening to her.

*To what extent and how can you see the "hand of God" as a cause for what happens in your life?*

### 5. Ruth Passes the Test (read Ruth 1:15-18)

*"But Ruth said, 'Entreat me not to leave you or to return from following you; for where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; where you die I will die, and there will I be buried'" (Ruth 1:16, 17, RSV).*

When Naomi challenged Ruth to return to her people and her gods as Orpah had done, it was clear that Naomi's test was theological, as well as practical and emotional. If Ruth's faith was really genuine she couldn't be tempted to return to Chemosh and the other gods of Moab. She couldn't and she didn't!

Ruth's response to Naomi is often quoted at weddings. It constitutes one of the most beautiful expressions of love and devotion to be found in the Bible. It must have been very much like what Christ had in mind when he responded to Peter's question:

*"Then Peter said in reply, 'Lo, we have left everything and followed you. What then shall we have?' Jesus said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. But many that are first will be last, and the last first'" (Matt. 19:27-30, RSV).*

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*How does one come to the place where his/her relationship to God becomes the most important value in life—a value for which one would willingly die? To what extent do other people—friends or relatives—play a role?*



# Practical Godliness

by Stacy Nelson

Naomi means "my pleasantness."<sup>1</sup> Her reputation, however, extended far beyond the meaning of her name and encapsulated God's proposed method of evangelizing the world. "One of the most effective ways of winning souls to Him is in exemplifying His character in our daily life. Our influence upon others depends not so much upon what we say as upon what we are. Men may combat and defy our logic, they may resist our appeals; but a life of disinterested love is an argument they cannot gainsay. A consistent life, characterized by the meekness of Christ, is a power in the world."<sup>2</sup>

Both Ruth and Orpah were bound by Oriental custom to serve Naomi, but she refused to obligate her daughters-in-law selfishly to service and relinquished her rightful claim.

Ruth was bound to Naomi by a power greater than that of custom or social contract, the power of practical love. Ruth evidently saw in the life of Naomi, not merely a lifeless theory but a living force that could change the life. Christ intended that His blessings be presented in the most alluring terms. "He is not content merely to announce these blessings; He presents them in the most attractive way, to excite a desire to possess them. So His servants are to present the riches of the glory of the unspeakable Gift. The wonderful love of Christ will melt and subdue hearts, when the mere reiteration of doctrines would accomplish nothing."<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of this story relates to Naomi's ability to manifest practical godliness inside the home environment. "It requires much patience and spirituality to bring Bible religion into the home life and into the workshop, to bear the strain of worldly business, and yet keep the eye single to the glory of God."<sup>4</sup>

In a day and age when the institution of the home has become a shattered image, it might be well to renew our efforts in making the influence of the home a power for good in the world. "The Christian home is to be an object-lesson, illustrating the excellence of the true principles of life. Such an illustration will be a power for good in the world. Far more powerful than any sermon that can be preached is the influence of a true home upon human hearts and lives."<sup>5</sup> "Unless there is practical self-sacrifice for the good of others, in the family circle, in the neighborhood, in the church, and wherever we may be, then whatever our profession, we are not Christians."<sup>6</sup>

## TESTIMONY

Key text:

1 John 3:18

1. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 430.
2. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 141, 142.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 826.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
5. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 352.
6. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 504.

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# The Loving Christian

by Robert Malin

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Ruth 1:1-16

In Matthew 1:3, 5, 6, in the genealogy of Christ, Matthew included four women in the otherwise all-male list. Considering the patriarchal nature of the Israelite society, their inclusion is quite unusual. The four women, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, have something in common: all of them were of non-Israelitic descent. Matthew included the Gentile element in the genealogy of Christ to demonstrate that Christ's coming was for all people. Likewise, the book of Ruth demonstrates the role of God's people in the world. Ruth is rewarded for her trust in God by becoming the great-grandmother of David and ultimately an ancestor of Christ. This is all the more remarkable in light of Deuteronomy 23:4-7, Jerusalem ("No Ammonite or Moabite is to be admitted to the assembly of Yahweh; not even their descendants to the tenth generation may be admitted to the assembly of Yahweh, and this is for all time. . . . Never, as long as you live, shall you seek their welfare or their prosperity.'") and proves how God's goodness is not constricted by human frontiers. Was the role of Naomi an example of the mission God intended for Israel, a mission that Christ explained in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:43-48)?

Even with the limited detail that is given about the life of Naomi and her sons in Moab, it is obvious that they were accepted in the community or they would hardly have stayed a minimum of ten years. The families of Ruth and Orpah must have approved of their marriages to Mahlon and Chilion or they would not have taken place. From the evidence of the strong bond of love that is found in verses 16 and 17, it is apparent that Naomi welcomed Ruth and Orpah into her home with warmth and love.

By the time of the death of her two sons the relationship between Naomi and her two daughters-in-law had grown into a strong bond of mutual trust and love. In Middle Eastern culture every woman was subordinate to a man, whether it be her father or her husband. Young, childless widows would have returned to the protection of their own parents' home. Naomi must have supported her daughters-in-law in their grief in a way that surpassed that of their own families. The love of these daughters-in-law for Naomi is shown by their decisions to accompany Naomi on a journey that would take them from their homeland and their own families. Even Orpah started that journey, and only Naomi's pressure to return to her homeland changed her mind.

Ruth's commitment to Naomi in verses 16 and 17 shows us the triumph of love over law (Deut. 23:3-7) just as Christ's supreme act of love triumphs over the law of sin.

## REACT

God works in the quiet times as well as the dramatic events of our lives. Can you think of some events of each type that particularly shaped your life?

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# Fidelity in a New Dimension

by Gillian Geraty

For those of us in North America, famine is difficult to relate to. We may have had a glimpse of what it means, seeing the pictures portrayed by television. But nothing in our experience exposes us to the full reality of having something so basic to life threatened. Nor can we fully appreciate the disruption such a loss has on our lives and the changes it brings about. Another Western attitude that we bring to the opening story of the flight into Moab is that running away from a problem does not solve it. American ingenuity will find a way out. But to this family moving to Moab, flight was the only solution they saw to their problem. The irony is that the death they faced by staying in their homeland caught up with them in their sojourn. In fact, a bleaker picture could not be portrayed—famine, dislocation, death, upheaval. Yet out of this situation steps a woman so radiant that we end up remembering only her. We focus in on her and see a passion we envy as she clings to her mother-in-law. She redefines for us the word *fidelity*. Without her we may have seen fidelity as a passive virtue—we may have even questioned whether it is a virtue. We may have wondered whether fidelity belongs to another decade, another context. After seeing Ruth kneeling on the dusty road, clutching her mother-in-law, hearing the intensity in her voice, fidelity comes to mean passion, intensity, unswerving loyalty, devotion, a timeless, enduring, enviable quality. We will never be the same after meeting her.

Ruth stands a radiant, strong figure from the past, and we feel it fitting that she step into the line of royal succession. In a patriarchal society it is interesting that Ruth is mentioned along with only three other women in the predominantly male genealogy of the Messiah found in Matthew 1. The three other women mentioned are: Tamar (Genesis 38), Rahab (Joshua 6), and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11).

## REACT

1. What characteristics does Ruth share with these other women?
2. Fidelity is usually associated with marriage commitments. In what other areas of life is fidelity an important component?
3. Ruth was a Moabitess, an alien, an outsider, who very clearly became active in accomplishing God's purposes. In what ways do people from "outside" His church still accomplish His purposes and are we willing to recognize their contributions?
4. Ruth experienced many losses—loss of husband, loss of status, loss of economic support, loss of family and country. How did Israel provide for someone like Ruth coming into their community? What does our church do for those who have experienced similar losses who come into our midst?

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## HOW TO

Key text:

Ruth 1:16, 17

# How Do You Solve a Problem Like Naomi?

by Karen Flowers

**OPINION**  
Key text:  
Ruth 1:20, 21

She didn't wish for memories, but they came anyway. Famine aside, life had been so full of promise when they left—a strong husband in the prime of life, looking out for the best for his family; herself a woman secure in her husband's love and fulfilled in her role as a mother of two sons. God had smiled on them then, making even their necessary sojourn into a foreign land more of an adventure than a trial.

Funny, she couldn't even picture God with a smile now. First the shock of her husband's unexpected death had made her world go black. But she had fought her way back, coped with the grief, the loneliness, the fear, the overload. She had done it—reared two boys by herself and seen them establish homes of their own. In them rested her hope, her future. She would live out her dreams in their lives.

But a cruel fate had snatched them, too. And now her darkness was so intense even the sights and sounds of home brought not the slightest glimmer of hope.

What a return it was! The whole town was stirred, glad to see Naomi again. But their gladness received a curt response: "Don't call me Naomi. . . . Call me Mara, for the Almighty has made my life very bitter" (Ruth 1:20, NIV).

Most of us would not agree with Naomi's theology. Hers is not a good concept of God. We would hasten to correct her, reason with her, give her a Bible study on the character of God. Nor would we be any more comfortable with her venting of her negative feelings. "The Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty." And so we would moralize, deny her feelings, or try to cajole her out of them.

True, there is a brighter, hope-filled view of a compassionate God, which Naomi desperately needs and which will do much to cheer her heart. But her feelings of pain prevent her from listening to reason, to moralizing, even to Bible study. Naomi is a textbook case of a person working her way through the stages of grief. If we were to plot her on the Holmes Life Events Scale, which measures levels of stress and potential for depression, even physical illness, her score would be perilously high.

It is not unusual for severe emotional pain to bring the reaction "Where is God? Why did He do this to me?" or the question that appears slightly more favorable to God but is still loaded with feeling, "Why did God allow this to happen?" But let us not be too hasty to correct the theology of the Naomis among us. It may be at this moment that they cannot respond any other way. Our primary task is to accept the hurting one just as he or she is, negative feelings and all. Listening, without judging or moralizing, will open the way for release of tension and pent up emotion. Caring and empathy will go far to restore the diminished sense of personal worth that often accompanies trial. This is what was needed by Naomi, and it began to happen soon after she came home.

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# The Homecoming

“ ‘May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge’ ” (Ruth 2:12, NIV).



# Tangled Threads

by Graham Bingham

When Handley Moule was Bishop of Durham, a very serious coal mine disaster took place. The bishop, Bible in hand, went to the mine to endeavor to comfort the sorrowing wives, mothers, brothers, sisters, and other relatives who had gathered at the site of the tragedy. Almost at a loss for words to express his deep sorrow and sympathy in such tragic circumstances, he opened his Bible, and a bookmark fell out. As he picked it up the Holy Spirit gave him the message for those passing through deep sorrow. On the bookmark, worked in silken threads, was the text "GOD IS LOVE." On the one side the words stood out lovely and clear, but the other side showed a mass of tangled threads. Holding up the wrong side, with the tangled threads first, he showed it to the weeping relatives and said, "This disaster, with the sorrow and loss it brings you, is like these tangled threads. It is unintelligible to you; you cannot understand it. But look," he said, turning the other side so that all could see, "like many things in our lives that we cannot understand, it tells that 'God is love.'"

Returning to Bethlehem was not a happy homecoming for Naomi. Even though the "whole town was stirred" by her arrival, she felt destitute. She had left Bethlehem full—

with a husband and two sons, but she returns home empty—having lost husband and both sons. What had happened in her life simply did not make sense. When the women of the town greet her by name, *Naomi* (which means "Pleasant"), she betrays her innermost feelings by responding remorsefully, "Don't call me Naomi, . . . call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter" (Ruth 1:20, NIV).

Naomi's experience is not unique. There are many occasions in the Christian life when nothing seems to make sense; when everything turns out bad; when everybody, including God, seems to be against us. How do we handle these dark moments of the soul? By believing that "God is love." And that even as we struggle with the doubts and discouragements of the tangled threads of our lives, God is working out the solutions to our problems and needs.

Naomi was unaware that, while the past was a bitter experience, the outworking of God's love would result in blessing and joy for her and Ruth in the present, and in the future to all people through Jesus Christ, who would come from the lineage of her daughter-in-law, Ruth.

It happened for Naomi and Ruth and it can happen for YOU—believe it!

## INTRO- DUCTION

Scripture:  
Ruth 1:19—2:23



# A God for Good Times and Bad

by Sakae Kubo

**LOGOS** Theme: Even as we struggle with doubt and discouragement, God is working out the solutions to our problems and needs.

## 1. Arrival in Bethlehem (read Ruth 1:19-22)

*"I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty" (Ruth 1:21a, RSV).*

A patriarchal society highly prized males. A male heir was important to carry on the family name. One can see very readily, then, why Naomi, with a husband and two sons, considered herself full when she left Bethlehem for Moab. Now, ten years later, she returns a widow, a widow who has two daughters-in-law who are also widows, one of whom remains in Moab. How empty can a person become! No wonder she tells the women not to call her Naomi ("pleasant") but Mara ("bitter"). Sweetness had turned to bitterness, and Naomi blamed God for it.

Didn't Naomi have valid reasons for her complaint? To have one's husband and two sons snatched by death in a patriarchal society is a disaster of major proportions. One can sympathize with Naomi. Yet what had she forgotten? She forgot that God had blessed her with a husband and two sons. Some had neither. She had survived the famine in Moab. Doubtless many died from the famine. She had a faithful and loyal daughter-in-law in Ruth. Above all, she had a God who looked after her. To trust God in good times is not a virtue. The triumph of faith comes when we trust God in bad times, when everything seems to be going against us. "Though the fig tree do not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab. 3:17, 18, RSV).

Life has its vicissitudes, its ups and downs. We cannot judge life by its downs or its ups. Ultimately it is our relationship to God that matters—not whether we prosper materially and physically or not. If Naomi continued to trust in God in spite of her setbacks, even if her story ended here, her life would spell victory.

*Can you identify with Naomi? Have you ever felt that "the hand of the Lord" was against you? Do we sometimes look at others and lament, "It is more bitter for me than for you"? (Ruth 1:13, NIV).*

## 2. Ruth Gleans in Boaz's Field (read Ruth 2:1-16)

*"Then she . . . said to him, 'Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?'" (Ruth 2:10, RSV).*

Chapter 1 ends with Naomi and Ruth in Bethlehem. The name Bethlehem to us conjures up images of royalty, since it was the city of David. The last verse of the book links the lineage of Obed, the son of Boaz and Ruth, to David. From our vantage point the historical trajectory carries the name Bethlehem from the throne to the

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stable, from King David to the Son of David, Jesus Christ. So the name Bethlehem amidst the tragedies of chapter 1 suggests hope for the future.

This section of Ruth points out contrasts. Boaz was wealthy; Ruth was poor. Boaz was a farmer with reapers and men in charge of the reapers; Ruth had no property and could only glean in the fields. Boaz was an older man (3:10); Ruth was a young woman. Boaz was a citizen of Bethlehem; Ruth was a foreigner, a Moabitess.

Yet there are also points in common between Boaz and Ruth. They both have admirable qualities. Ruth is a diligent, industrious worker (2:7). Ruth is an appreciative person (2:10, 13). Ruth is a faithful and loyal daughter-in-law who had left father and mother and her native land to join her mother-in-law in a land that she did not know. She was also a considerate person. She kept some of the food that Boaz gave her for Naomi. Boaz was concerned about a person's welfare. He did not want Ruth to be molested and thought of her physical needs by providing water for her (2:5-9). Boaz was generous and unprejudiced in helping a foreigner. "There is a sensitivity about Boaz and a depth of appreciation that make him more interested in character than in blood."\* (2:11, 12). Boaz was kind and large-hearted in inviting this poor foreign gleaner woman to eat with him, the wealthy citizen farmer. He further instructs his young men to allow her to glean among the sheaves and even to pull out some from the bundles for her to glean from to make her work a little lighter.

The narrator had already informed the reader that Boaz was a kinsman of Elimelech, the husband of Naomi. But the story unfolds without either Boaz or Ruth aware of this relationship. We find two kind, considerate, and thoughtful persons spontaneously responding as they encounter each other in the course of life through the providence of God.

*What are some ways we can translate God's concern for the disadvantaged into action today? In such work, are there practices we do that might injure the dignity and self-respect of those we seek to help? How could we do them in a different way that would protect an individual's sense of self-worth?*

### **3. Ruth Returns With the Good News (read Ruth 2:17-23)**

*"And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, 'Blessed be he by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!'" (Ruth 2:20a, RSV).*

Ruth returns home in the evening with about half a bushel of barley. Her mother-in-law asks her where she gleaned that day. Ruth informs her that it was in the field of Boaz. She must have told her also of his kindnesses to her. Naomi recognizes Boaz as a relative and blesses the Lord for the good fortune that has come to them.

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Naomi, who had blamed God for her misfortunes, now praises Him for her present good fortune. God was the same God in misfortune and in good fortune. He had not changed.

He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. God is always love. We need to trust His love in good times and bad times. We see only a tiny slice of time, but God sees everything from the beginning to the end. If we could see things from the perspective of eternity, as God sees, we would become relaxed in His care and love, even in bad times.

And Ruth continued to glean in the field of Boaz until the end of the barley and wheat harvests, and God continued to work out His providence through the lives of Boaz and Ruth.

*Why do we blame God when things go badly and take the credit when things go well?*

*Do good things always happen to good people? Why or why not?*

*Does God seem closer when things are going well but more remote when things are going badly? Why or why not the opposite?*

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\* James T. Cleland,  
"The Book of Ruth:  
Exposition,"  
*Interpreter's Bible*  
(New York and Nashville:  
Abingdon Press, 1953),  
vol. 2, pp. 841, 842.

# The Homecoming

by Theodore Lopez

Our lesson deals with two homecomings, one literal and the other figurative. When Naomi, now a widow, learned that Palestine was no longer suffering famine, but that "the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread,"<sup>1</sup> she was encouraged to leave her home in Moab and return to Bethlehem.

Ruth, because of her love for the older woman, and her desire to know Naomi's God, had made her decision to stay with her mother-in-law. Naomi's influence on Ruth was a very positive witness. "Such testimony will have an influence upon others. No more effective means can be employed for winning souls to Christ. We are to praise God by tangible service, by doing all in our power to advance the glory of His name. God imparts His gifts to us that we also may give, and thus make known His character to the world."<sup>2</sup> "There's no greater power than the influence exerted by an unselfish life."<sup>3</sup>

Ruth's homecoming is figurative and represents all who leave "other gods" and come to Him. Ellen White states that "all who, like Rahab the Canaanite and Ruth the Moabitess, turned from idolatry to the worship of the true God were to unite themselves with His chosen people."<sup>4</sup>

They returned to Bethlehem at the time of the barley harvest, and Ruth immediately set about providing for their daily needs. She requests the permission of Naomi to glean in the field.

We are also shown that the circumstances of life that seem to "happen" to us are in reality providential. Ruth "chanced" to glean in the field of Boaz, a relative of her dead husband. "Those who accept the one principle of making the service and honor of God supreme will find perplexities vanish, and a plain path before their feet."<sup>5</sup> And, again we are shown that when we accept God we "are not left as orphans, to bear life's trials alone. He receives . . . [us] as members of the heavenly family."<sup>6</sup>

Through the day Ruth gleaned from Boaz's field, and when she was offered supper she did not forget Naomi, but saved a portion of her meal to bring to her mother-in-law. "When we ourselves have taken deep draughts of Christ's love, we find that an infinite supply remains."<sup>7</sup> Ruth's concern for Naomi is shown in her unselfishness of action. "Unselfishness mark[s] the words and deeds of those who are born again to live the new life in Christ."<sup>8</sup>

## REACT

What kind of witness are we for the Lord?

## TESTIMONY

**Key text:**  
Isaiah 43:10a;  
Ruth 2:12

1. Ruth 1:6
2. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 300.
3. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 470.
4. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 19.
5. *The Desire of the Ages*, p. 330.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 327.
7. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 435.
8. *My Life Today*, p. 52.

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# Let the Lord Provide

by Brian Burgess

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Hebrews 11:1

In my academy Bible book I remember reading a story about Joseph Bates. The story dealt with how he was convicted to publish papers on his understanding of the Bible.

The theme of one story was "The Lord will provide," a narrative of how Joseph Bates had faith that the Lord would provide a way of meeting his financial needs. These needs included a source of food for his household and a way of publishing his writings in order to inspire others. His wife, who had less faith than he, was said to have given up faith that 'the Lord would provide,' a belief often quoted by her husband. At the end of the story Joseph received some money in the mail from an unknown source, the sender stating that he felt impressed to send this money to Bates, for he had a strong feeling that it might be needed by him. Immediately, Mr. Bates bought some flour, sugar, and other supplies that his family had run out of that same day. With the rest of the donation he made a partial payment on some overdue printing expenses and writing materials.

If we have faith like that of Joseph Bates, and Ruth, wouldn't the Lord provide for us? He provided for Ruth, and she was a Moabite. For most of her life she had worshiped another god, and did not have a relationship with the God of heaven (see Ruth 1:16).

Today some in our own church do not seem to have faith in the Lord equal to that of the people mentioned above. They claim that Adventist schools are too expensive. Students feel that they need their cars, clothes, and other accessories. They feel that 10 to 20 percent of their income is too much to ask toward church expenses and support of missions. Some claim that they must work on Sabbath in order to keep their jobs.

While in our younger years, we need to listen to the prophets, and of course to God; for He will provide! That belief may not be as sophisticated or as comfortable as we desire, but neither will persecution or judgment if we do not prepare now.

## REACT

1. Like Ruth and Naomi we may have to go through shattering experiences. Can we continue to trust God even though we may never know in this life why some things happen?

2. When does our struggle to understand the actions of God begin to shade into a denial of faith?

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# How to Find the Right Field

by Ingrid Kerstin Sbacchi

The right field of work, the right field of study in college, the right field to "play in" when looking for a mate, the right plot on which to build our homes, the right place for our children to grow, the right land from which to glean for our survival. How do we decide? These are major decisions in people's lives, which lead to success, mediocrity, or disaster.

Advice from others, careful study, prayer, openness to God's guidance, and experience are the means by which we weed out the wrong and bad and eventually discover, if fortunate, a very good field. How did Ruth find the field? The field owned by Boaz, the field that would provide more than a meager means of existence for herself and her mother-in-law.

In the story of Ruth there are simple guidelines disclosed, which, if followed, will help us find the "right" field.

**1. Always trust in God.** Ruth, a Moabite, worshiped the heathen god Chemosh. However, since her contact with Naomi, Ruth admired and respected Naomi's faith. This respect no doubt prompted Ruth to give up the security of her homeland to travel to the land of Naomi. Ruth perhaps didn't know she was trusting God by leaving her home and following her mother-in-law. She believed Naomi's God would take care of them, "your God will be my God." And God did take care of them. When Ruth just "happened" to go and work in the field of Boaz the events that followed led in the future to the birth of Christ. Let God take care of you. Follow what you know to be His will, and He will lead you to the right field.

**2. Do not fear to reach out in love to others.** Ruth loved her mother-in-law. She selflessly followed her to Bethlehem even though Naomi told her three times that she should stay in Moab. When you reach out in love to others you will in return be loved. If Ruth hadn't loved Naomi as much as she did, she would never have moved to Bethlehem, where she met Boaz. Her love was proved again when she went to work to provide for herself and Naomi. If Ruth had not gone to work she may not have met Boaz and received his love.

**3. Look beyond the present.** Have patience. Perhaps there seems no reason for the duties you perform everyday. Trust God enough to see that He can work good out of your present situation. Try looking back from where you are now and think about where you were before. Reflect on how a seemingly meaningless or very trying experience of the past is helping you today. Just so, your present experiences will aid you in the future. For 16 hours Ruth collected the leftover sheaves of grain in the field. She wasn't even gleaning her own fields! But that backbreaking, monotonous, humbling work brought her a place in history. Ruth became the ancestor of David and ultimately of Jesus Christ—the Kinsman-Redeemer of the world. God led Ruth to the right field, His field.

**HOW TO**  
**Key Text:**  
**Ruth 2:12**

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# Trusting— the Ultimate Change

by Michael A. Cruz

## OPINION

Key text:  
Ruth 1:16

In the key text for today (Ruth 1:16) Ruth makes a tremendous statement of faith. This statement can come only to a person who has seen something better in life. Apparently Ruth saw something different in the life-style of her former husband and her mother-in-law, Naomi. She must have seen within her own mind's eye the senseless rituals and emptiness of her own religion. Ruth concludes that to go back to Moab is to revert to her old ways, but to go forward is to experience a newness of life found only in serving the true God.

So it must be with His children today. We must recognize our spiritual condition and acknowledge that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). We must realize that in serving the true God we will experience (as Ruth experienced) a newness of life that comes only at the feet of Jesus.

Ruth had come to the place where she now trusted in the God of Israel (Ruth 2:12). Because of this childlike trust, and the change of life-style the righteousness of Jehovah produced in her, Boaz makes a wonderful statement: "And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest; for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman" (3:11).

To think that the same wonderful power of God that created all things, animate and inanimate, is the same force that can re-create the human being into the likeness of the Creator.

Ruth's life had been changed. She had been touched by the Holy One of Israel. The image of God was manifested in her life to such an extent that Boaz decided to take her as his wife (4:10).

Ruth now shows her love toward Naomi by allowing her to nurse the child born to the marriage. This is a manifestation of true love (Ruth 4:13-16). The name of the child was Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David; and Jesus Christ is the root and offspring of David.

These four chapters of the Bible are a few of the most beautiful to read. The lessons taught in them must be applied to our own Christian experience. By simple trust we must allow God to transform us.

"Those who wait for the Bridegroom's coming are to say to the people, 'Behold your God.' The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory."\*

Let us as a people look, trust, and, by His righteousness, be changed.

## REACT

Paraphrase Ruth's reply in words that fit your own life situation and circumstances (Ruth 1:16).

\* *Christ's Object Lessons*,  
pp. 415, 416.

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# RECOMMENDED READING



If you want to put meaning into your life or if you simply enjoy constructive topical investigation, one of the following books may be right for you. ■ Have you ever wished for a practical, nuts-and-bolts discussion of successful Christian living? If so, **WEIGHT ON THE LORD**, by Randy Maxwell, is for you! **WEIGHT ON THE LORD** is all about trust. Trusting in the Lord. Learn how you, too, can cast your burdens upon Jesus. US\$4.95/Cdn\$6.95. ■ If you want your life to really count and if you want to realize your dreams, **THE GO-GETTER**, by Susan Fenton Willoughby, is for you. Packed with practical advice for achieving success. US\$6.95/Cdn\$9.75. ■ **CHRISTIANITY MAKES SENSE**, by Kenneth Hopp, is a no-nonsense examination of Christianity by a former agnostic. As you read, you will discover that the arguments for Christianity and the evidences in its favor are stronger and more convincing than those against it. US\$5.95/Cdn\$8.35. ■ **ELLEN WHITE AND VEGETARIANISM—Did she practice what she preached?** by Roger Coon. This is a factual, frank discussion and examination of the allegations and evidence. Written by an authority on the life of Mrs. White who has access to relevant documents on her life. US\$1.25/Cdn\$1.75 ■ To get your copies see your ABC today or call toll free in the continental US 1-800-253-3000 (In Alaska and Hawaii 1-800-253-3002).

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# Under His Wings

" 'Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign Lord, and you became mine' " (Ezekiel 16:8, NIV).





# Lessons In Love

by Patricia Maxwell

The first time I met Mike and Susan, he pushed her in a wheel chair toward the registration table at a Revelation Seminar in Hays, Kansas. A good-looking young man with a spontaneous smile, Mike introduced himself and his wife. "Hello!" I replied to both. "Ra-er-er-oh," Susan grunted. I reached out to shake hands and realized hers couldn't move, so I patted her in welcome. Mike picked up two Bibles and notebooks and pushed his wife toward a table. He unbuttoned Susan's jacket and removed it, adjusted a pillow behind her neck and chatted cheerfully while she responded in guttural sounds.

Cough-grunt sounds from Susan punctuated the evening, and I wondered why a handsome young man would be married to such a severely handicapped person.

As they came to the seminar night by night we got better acquainted, and I learned that Susan had always been handicapped and that Mike had married her that way. "The first time I saw her I thought she was as cute as a button," he said, and I watched her eyes sparkle as he spoke. Mike had a job, and someone came in to look after Susan while he was away; but the rest of the time he took care of her.

I wondered who did the housework, the laundry, and fixed the meals. He said he

did, but she helped. "We like to do things together," he said, "so I wheel her into the kitchen, and she gets her hands into the cooking!" They both laughed. Later, when my husband and I visited their tiny home, I marveled that a wheel chair could be maneuvered in such tight quarters.

One evening Mike shared that they had been out shopping for a Christmas tree. I couldn't imagine why anyone would bother to bundle someone up, lift them in and out of a wheel chair, and push them around bumpy Christmas-tree lots. I'd have done the Christmas-tree shopping by myself, if it had been I.

The evening before we left Hays, Mike and Susan visited us. Our apartment was a basement one, and the stairs nonnegotiable for a wheel chair, so we stood outside in the 20-degree weather and talked. They gave us a loaf of holiday bread that they had made "together." We joined hands and prayed, then said goodbye. As Mike wheeled Susan toward their van, he called out "Merry Christmas!" Susan echoed "Ra-a-er-r-ah."

I squeezed my husband's hand and wondered whether I knew anything about what makes a marriage a happy, sharing, intimate relationship.

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture:  
Ruth 3:1-18

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# A Trustworthy Trio

by Patricia Maxwell

**LOGOS** Theme: God seeks to bring His people into an intimate relationship with Him. This union with God often is symbolized in the Bible by the marriage relationship.

## 1. Naomi Plans for Ruth's Future (read Ruth 3:1-6)

*"One day Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, 'My daughter, should I not try to find a home for you, where you will be well provided for?'" (Ruth 3:1, NIV).*

Naomi's concern for her daughter-in-law, Ruth, had not changed from what it was when they left Moab. Note chapter 1:9. She realized that Ruth needed a husband and a home of her own. Without it she would always be a poor widow, struggling for survival.

Of course, Naomi knew *she* had no security either, and it could be suggested that Naomi's real motive was to provide a place for herself. Would there be anything wrong with that motive? When Ruth followed Naomi to Judah it added to Naomi's responsibilities. If Naomi's motives were self-serving maybe they should have been!

One thing is clear. Naomi saw the need. Ruth needed a husband, but not *any* husband. He needed to be a kinsman who could redeem the land that had been lost to Naomi. Without the family land-inheritance Ruth would always be a gleaner of other people's crops, and Naomi would have to exist on Ruth's fragile position as a servant. The two women would be locked into a continuous struggle for survival.

Considering this, it's interesting to notice the word Naomi used for "home." The margin of the NIV translates "find a home" as "find rest." It uses the same term in chapter 1:9. In a home of her own, Ruth would find rest from her work for self-survival.

What parallels do you see between Ruth's need for a home and "rest" and the needs of all humans for spiritual rest, security, and a "home" in the family of God?

Naomi not only tells Ruth what she needs but how to get it. The fact that Ruth obeyed her suggests that Ruth accepted Naomi as a trustworthy person. In introducing Ruth to the true God and then to the right husband Naomi is seen as acting in the role of an "introducer," which is the role of a Christian witness. But Naomi's success in "witnessing" was based on Ruth's trust in her.

*How important do you think trustworthiness is in witnessing? Can meaningful introductions to Christ occur without it? If not, how do you establish yourself as a trustworthy witness?*

## 2. At the Threshing Floor (read Ruth 3:7-14)

*"I will do whatever you say," Ruth answered. So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do" (Ruth 3:5, 6, NIV).*

This statement, "I will do whatever you say," did not come from a weak, door-mat personality; but from one who had the courage

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to leave her homeland against her mother-in-law's advice and her sister-in-law's example. Ruth obeyed because she believed not only in Naomi but also in Naomi's God. She was strong in her convictions but humble in her attitude as illustrated in the way she identified herself to Boaz as "your servant Ruth" (3:9, NIV).

Boaz recognized Ruth's qualities and commended her. He noticed her kindness and her "nobleness" in not running after younger men (3:10, 11, NIV) and he quickly said Yes to her proposal.

Why do you think he accepted Ruth's proposal? What was in it for him? He knew he would be getting not just one woman, but two, to care for. He would have to buy back or "redeem" Naomi's property, and then it wouldn't be his, but would go to any son whom he and Ruth should produce. From a business perspective, Boaz would be doing all the giving, and Ruth and Naomi all the receiving. Boaz must have seen something else in this relationship.

What was it and how does it compare with Christ's viewpoint of our relationship with Him?

In a few sentences, Boaz's character is drawn as a kind, considerate, generous, moral, honest man of action. He's up front with Ruth in telling her there is another closer kinsman. He's concerned with her reputation in suggesting she leave before daylight, and he's generous in loading her shawl with barley.

*What other characteristics do you discover about Boaz, and in what ways is he like Christ, our Kinsman-Redeemer?*

*The gift of grain to Ruth could be seen as a deposit, guaranteeing that Boaz would do what he said. What deposit is given to Christians when they begin a relationship with Jesus? (See Ephesians 1:13, 14.)*

### **3. Ruth reports back to Naomi (read Ruth 3:16-18)**

*"Then Naomi said, 'Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today'" (Ruth 3:18, NIV).*

*Wait is a difficult word to live with. Yes and No are easier to accept, yet the Bible often talks about Christians' need to "wait on the Lord."*

*Do you see any comparison between Ruth's having to wait for Boaz to work out legal complications in order to redeem her and Christians having to wait today for Jesus to complete His work in heaven before He can come to redeem us from this world? What comparisons would you make? What assurance does He give us?*

*Naomi's assurance was based on her knowledge of Boaz's character. In what ways is our assurance enhanced or limited by our knowledge of Christ's character?*

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# "A Marriage Made in Heaven"

by Patricia Maxwell

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
2 Corinthians  
11:2

"Of Christ's relation to His people, there is a beautiful illustration in the laws given to Israel. When through poverty a Hebrew had been forced to part with his patrimony, . . . the duty of redeeming him and his inheritance fell to the one who was nearest of kin. See Lev. 25:25, 47-49; Ruth 2:20. So the work of redeeming us and our inheritance, lost through sin, fell upon Him who is 'near of kin' unto us. It was to redeem us that He became our kinsman. Closer than father, mother, brother, friend, or lover is the Lord our Saviour."<sup>1</sup>

"In the Bible the sacred and enduring character of the relation that exists between Christ and His church is represented by the union of marriage. The Lord has joined His people to Himself by a solemn covenant, He promising to be their God, and they pledging themselves to be His and His alone. . . . The unfaithfulness of the church to Christ in permitting her confidence and affection to be turned from Him, and allowing the love of worldly things to occupy the soul, is likened to the violation of the marriage vow."<sup>2</sup>

"You are in spiritual wedlock with Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup>

"By the marriage is represented the union of humanity with divinity."<sup>4</sup>

"Very close and sacred is the relation between Christ and His church—He the bridegroom, and the church the bride; He the head, and the church the body. Connection with Christ, then, involves connection with His church. The church is organized for service; and in a life of service to Christ, connection with the church is one of the first steps. Loyalty to Christ demands the faithful performance of church duties. This is an important part of one's training; and in a church imbued with the Master's life, it will lead directly to effort for the world without."<sup>5</sup>

## REACT

Has my connection with Christ led to a close, intimate connection and relationship with the church?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 327.
2. *The Great Controversy*, pp. 381, 382.
3. *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 6, p. 462.
4. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 307.
5. *Education*, pp. 268, 269.

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# "Will You Marry Me?"

by Patricia Maxwell

"Spread the corner of your garment over me" (Ruth 3:9, NIV) does not sound like "Will you marry me?" but that's what it meant to Ruth and Boaz.

"To spread a skirt over one is, in the East, a symbolical action denoting protection. To this day in many parts of the East to say of any one that he put his skirt over a woman is synonymous with saying that he married her; and at all the marriages of the modern Jews and Hindus one part of the ceremony is for the bridegroom to put a silken or cotton cloak around his bride."<sup>1</sup>

In this curious phrase, "spread . . . your garment over me," we find the way to a divine-human relationship spelled out.

First, is the need of humanity. When Adam and Eve sinned they became naked (Gen. 3:7-11). Other texts equate sin with nakedness (Zech. 3:3-5; Rev. 3:17, 18). The solution to this need is God's garments: "For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness" (Isa. 61:10, NIV). "I counsel you to buy from me . . . white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness" (Rev. 3:18, NIV).

Linguists say that "spread your garments" could be translated "spread your wings over me." "It is used with this meaning . . . when Boaz speaks of the religious aspect of Ruth's change of country . . . ([Ruth] 2:12, AV). Ruth had put herself under Yahweh's 'wing' when she came to Judah. Now she seeks also to put herself under that of Boaz."<sup>2</sup>

God seeks for the same relationship with His people. "How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings" (Matt. 23:37, NIV).

Whether we interpret the words in Ruth 3 as "garments" or "wings," we can apply the following lessons: If we are to establish a relationship with God we must come in a humble attitude, acknowledging our need. We must also ask the right question. Ruth could have continued in a servant-gleaner role; instead, she asked for a relationship. And she asked the right man. Nobody but a kinsman-redeemer could answer her needs completely. She might have "run after the younger men," as Boaz observed she did not; but none of them could have done for her what Boaz could do. We might "run after" other friends, but they will not do for us what Jesus, our Kinsman-Redeemer, can do for us.

## REACT

Knowing the psychology of human nature, Naomi instructed Ruth to wash and perfume herself and dress in her best clothes. Then the daughter-in-law was to wait until Boaz had eaten and gone to sleep after the hard day of harvesting. Is there anything wrong with helping a situation out? Does God expect us to do everything possible to smooth the way for the outworking of His will?

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text:**  
Ruth 3:9 and  
Ezekiel 16:8

1. Paul P. Enns, *Ruth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), p. 52, citing *A Commentary Critical, Experimental and Practical on the Old and New Testaments*, 6 vols. "Ruth" volume. 1945 reprint.

2. Leon Morris, *Ruth, An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press), pp. 289, 290.

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# Honeymoon— Who Says It Must End?

by Patricia Maxwell

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**Ephesians**  
**5:22, 23**

Many magazines consistently carry articles on how to have a happier marriage, but perhaps there should be a few how-to articles on our relationship with God. There are several similarities.

## 1. Be Committed.

In today's society many couples have only a halfhearted commitment to make their marriages work. But marriage counselors stress that it takes total commitment by both partners to build a good relationship. It takes total commitment between God and us to build an intimate relationship with Him, too.

On His side, He promises "I will make an everlasting covenant with you" (Isa. 55:3, NIV) and "I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered" (Ps. 89:34, NIV). But what about us? Have we made a solid commitment to Him or is it a halfhearted one that says, "I'll wait and see how it goes"? Or did we make a commitment at one time, then back out when things got tough? Whatever our commitment level, it's never too late to strengthen it by saying, "Lord, I'm committed to You regardless of what comes."

## 2. Express your love every day.

If couples don't act or talk as though they care, then pretty soon they don't care. Love needs constant expression to grow. And the same is true with God. He tells us, "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3, NIV). He not only says it but acts it, too, in giving and caring. But when was the last time you said out loud to Him, "I love You, Lord"? Why not take a minute right now to tell Him you love Him? And be sure to add loving, obedient deeds to your words, too.

## 3. Communicate.

If there's anything that quickly kills a marriage it's lack of communication. "Make time for each other," marriage counselors advise. "Set aside time each day to talk, and schedule a weekly date with each other." The same could be said about our relationship with God. He has done His part to communicate with us by sending His Word into the world and He even sets aside a day each week for a "date" with us. But we forget to take time with Him each day, and by Sabbath we're too tired or have lost interest. Then we wonder why our relationship with Him isn't alive anymore. But it can come alive if we'll begin communicating with Him.

## REACT

1. What fundamental difference between the metaphor of fatherhood and that of marriage warns us that we cannot take our relationship with God for granted?

2. How do some church members abuse their marriage relationship with the Bridegroom, Jesus?

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# It Takes a Lot of Faith

by Patricia Maxwell

## OPINION

Key text:  
Gal. 3:26

When I got married I didn't have complete knowledge about my husband. I had a year's worth of observations and experiences, plus recommendations from friends. I particularly cherished my dean's remark "He's a good man. He's going to make something of himself." But comparing all I didn't know with the little I did know, made marriage a plunge of faith. I had little guarantee that he'd stay with me "through sickness and health" and a lot less in between. Did I know, for sure, that we'd be happy? No. We began and continued by faith.

Ruth didn't have complete knowledge about Boaz, either. In his harvest fields she gleaned experiences and knowledge about him, but mostly she relied on the recommendation and direction of her mother-in-law. For her, a foreigner, to marry a Jew must have been a plunge of faith.

My knowledge of Christ was limited, too, before "we got together." I gleaned in the fields, on the periphery as it were, of a real relationship. I observed other people's relationships with Him and read recommendations about Him from His Word. But to make a total commitment to Him was a plunge of faith. How did I know whether He really meant what He said about taking care of me? About our being happy? And about life's being "more abundant" with Him? I didn't know. I began and continued by faith.

During the years my husband and I have been married we've experienced good times and bad, challenges and problems. I didn't always act or speak lovingly. Once I briefly considered breaking our relationship. Yet today my husband still says, "I love you," but I realize that my behavior hasn't always been very reassuring to him. He's had to exercise a lot of faith in me!

During the years I've been with Christ there've been good times and bad, challenges and problems. Some of the difficulties I created myself. I haven't always acted like a person in partnership with Him. At times I considered breaking our relationship. Yet He still says, "I love you," but when I reflect on my unpredictable behavior I realize Jesus exercises more faith in me than I have in Him. And I'm moved to respond all over again, "I love You, Lord. Let's stay together—by faith."

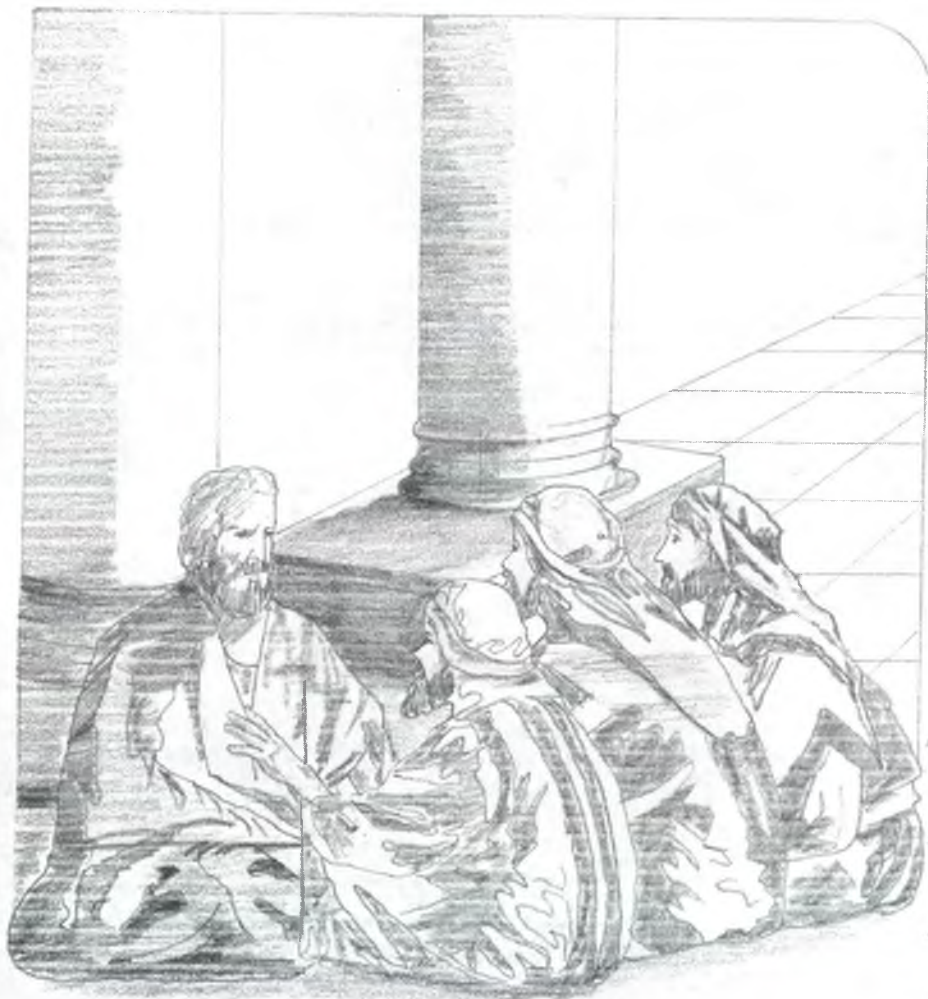
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Lesson 5, October 25-31

# Justice at the Gate

“ ‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land’ ” (Jeremiah 23:5, NIV).





# "I Suppose I Am Guilty."

by Lyndon McDowell

The thousand-mile trip in an old car had been a nightmare of rough roads, blowouts, and an overheating engine. Only ten more miles, and I would be home. Dog tired, I could already relish the warm welcome, the hot bath, and the good sleep that would soon be mine. Then it happened. As I rounded a bend in the road, there before me stood a policeman with raised hand.

My heart sank. I knew what he wanted. There was a campaign on to ensure that cars were roadworthy and he wanted to test my car. After a thousand miles I knew the car's every defect. There were many, and I was in trouble.

As it turned out, the policeman was kind. My tag number indicated that I had come from a university town and confirmed that I was a student. Instead of citing me for everything that was wrong with the car, he settled with a citation for a noisy exhaust. In due time the summons came.

"You had better just pay the fine," my father suggested. "No," I insisted, "I don't think it's fair to fine me at the end of a rough thousand-mile journey. The car was roadworthy when I left Cape Town."

So off I went to court. I had never been in a courtroom before. I knew nothing of court procedures and I was unsure of where to go or what to do. Seeing two men talking out-

side, I approached them for help.

"You have come to the right person," said one, "this is the public prosecutor. He is just the person to help you." What relief! I had found a friend.

"Come with me," he said, "I'll see you through quickly."

We went to the courthouse, and just as we stepped inside the courtroom my "friend" turned to me and in an austere, professional voice asked,

"Do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

I hesitated, "The car was making a noise but . . ."

"Do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

His eyes were suddenly hard. Seeing no humor or help in them, I groped for words.

"Well, the car was making a noise so I suppose I am guilty . . ." That was all he needed.

He turned abruptly, walked up to the judge, whispered something and handed him the summons papers. The judge wasted no time in handing down the sentence.

"I fine the accused . . ."

I was flabbergasted. I hadn't even had a chance to defend myself. My protests were in vain.

That day I learned two simple lessons. First, the public prosecutor is no friend of the accused. He is there for simply one purpose—to get a guilty verdict. Second, if you must go to court get an advocate.

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture:  
Ruth 4:1, 2  
and 1 John 2:1,  
NKJV

Lyndon McDowell is the pastor of the Pennsylvania Avenue Church in Washington, D.C.

# Judgment and Gospel

by Lyndon McDowell

**LOGOS** Theme: The judgment is an integral part of the gospel and provides God's answer to the accusations of the arch-antichrist against the justice of God and the character of His people.

## 1. The Work of the "Branch"

"Behold, the days are coming' says the LORD, 'that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth' " (Jer. 23:5).\*

These words are in stark contrast to what Jeremiah had been saying. "Destruction upon destruction is cried, for the whole land is plundered" (4:20) had been his message. Now came a bright ray of hope.

"Behold, the days are coming." The words direct attention to the certainty of the promise about to be given, and at the same time they allude to the contrast that the future holds to the present, visible, state of affairs. The word of God is certain. His promise *will be fulfilled*. In the face of all that the enemy had done, God would deliver His people.

"I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness." The words are unfamiliar to our ears, but they would be very familiar to the people of Jeremiah's day. A comparison with Phoenician and Ugaritic inscriptions shows that the word translated "Branch" means a "legitimate descendent." This descendent would bring about a reign of justice and righteousness. The kings of Judah and Israel had been at best ineffective and at worst rebellious. As a result of their reigns the present conditions of invasion, destruction, and servitude had come about. But the heir of David would "reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth."

The word *righteousness* (sedaqah), has a whole spectrum of meanings. Compare its use in Isaiah 53:11 where Christ is described as the suffering servant. He would provide "an offering for sin" (53:10), and "by His knowledge my righteous Servant shall *justify* many" (53:11). The margin of the NIV reads "By knowledge of him my righteous servant will justify many." If we were to put the sentence in the passive form it would read, "By knowledge of Him many will be justified." But Daniel 8:14 is the only place in the Bible where the passive form of the word *sadaq* is used. Jeremiah 23:5 and Isaiah 53:11 together summarize two fundamental aspects of the Messiah's reign. (1) His righteousness will be the basis of the justification of God's people and (2) he will usher in a kingdom where a condition of righteousness, deliverance, and salvation will be the rule. Thus the judgment confirms His right to save us, (Zech. 3:1-4), and declares the rulership of Christ over His kingdom, (Dan. 7:14).

The judgment must be seen in the light of the great controversy. Thirty-three percent of the angels were led into rebellion (Rev. 12:4). This caused unimaginable trauma throughout the far-flung universe and thousands of years of misery upon earth. Consequent upon Lucifer's rebellion Adam sinned. He surrendered his kingship

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to Lucifer, who became the prince of this world, and he used his power to enslave and imprison. He "made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed its cities, who did not open the house of his prisoners" (Isa. 14:17).

Isaiah, Jeremiah, and John saw Babylon as the symbol of rebellion, and they prophesied of its final overthrow and the triumphant reign of Christ. The sin of Israel and consequent enslavement by Babylon was a microcosm of what had taken place in heaven and on Planet Earth.

Christ, the Messiah, the "Branch of righteousness," would come to deliver the oppressed, set the prisoners free (Luke 4:18), and by means of judgment, would bring about a condition of justice.

## 2. The Outcome of Messiah's Rule (read Jeremiah 23:6)

When Ruth came to Bethlehem not only was she the subject of a ban as a Moabitess but she was powerless to do anything about it, let alone gain an entrance into the household of Israel. But she found a "kinsman-redeemer." The word is used thirteen times in the four short chapters of the book, and it clearly portrays the work of Christ. Ruth chapter 4 and verses 14 and 15 throbs with the blessings that flowed from her redemption. The men at the gate said, "The LORD make the woman who is coming to your house like Rachel and Leah, the two who built the house of Israel; and may you prosper in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. May your house be like the house of Perez . . . because of the offspring which the LORD will give you from this young woman" (Ruth 4:11, 12). And the "women said to Naomi, 'Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a near kinsman [margin, kinsman-redeemer]; and may his name be famous in Israel! And may he be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age . . .'" (4:14, 15).

In similar fashion Jeremiah 23:6 gives a bright sunlit picture of the consequences of Messiah's judgments. There is in these words the expressed hope of the final fulfillment of the promise in Deuteronomy 33:27, 28:

"The eternal God is your refuge,  
And underneath are the everlasting arms;  
He will thrust out the enemy from before you,  
And will say, "Destroy!"  
Then Israel shall dwell in safety . . .  
His Heavens shall also drop dew.  
Happy are you, O Israel!  
Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD.'"

The glorious destiny of God's people, hoped for in Israel, planned for in the restoration from exile, and provided for through Jesus Christ, will ultimately be experienced when all questions are answered in the great judgment. Universal praise will then be given to

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Jesus Christ. "Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jer. 23:6).

One ancient Jewish commentator translated the passage "Israel shall call the Messiah by this name: The Lord our righteousness, because at His time, the righteousness of the Lord will be to us firm, continuous, everlasting." Another commentator wrote, "Scripture calls the name of the Messiah: The Lord our righteousness, because He is the Mediator of God, and we obtain the righteousness of God by His ministry."

We have been too negative in our view of the judgment. The judgment is God's means of bringing an end to the oppression of His people. It is the means by which the terrible cosmic trauma is healed, the questions resolved, and righteousness and peace are made to reign once more.

*With Jesus as my Judge, do I need to worry about whether He will be able to save me? What attitude should Christians take concerning the judgment? (see 1 John 4:17).*

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\* All Scripture references in this week's lesson, except where otherwise noted, are from the NKJV.



# The Accuser

by Lyndon McDowell

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Revelation 6:17

On August 22, 1850, Ellen White had an impressive dream that well illustrates how Satan is the accuser and that our only hope in judgment is in the blood of Christ. With Brother Rhodes, James, and her little baby they were traveling in a wagon over a bridge covered with water. Ellen became very frightened, but Rhodes assured her several times that she need have no fear. After they had passed over the bridge, she writes, "My eyes were attracted to something strange in the air. I saw angels marching through the air singing with solemn, clear voices, 'For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?' Their voices rang through the air. . . . I stood trembling with fear. My life came up before [me] and looked so full of wrongs I could not see how I should be able to stand. Just then Satan came where I was and said to me, 'You are lost; you are now my property [and] will go with me to the dark regions.' My feelings I cannot describe. To be separated from the Jesus I had loved and to take up my abode with those that I abhorred looked dreadful to me. At the same time, I felt unworthy to be with the lovely Jesus.

"While in this dreadful perplexity one of the angels came where I was and said to Satan, 'She is not your property, for she has been redeemed unto God by the precious blood of Jesus. She is the purchase of His blood.' Satan fled. My feelings changed. My soul was overflowing with gratitude and thankfulness to God. I saw the saints as there fell [on them] and was reflected from the face of Jesus, light. Their faces would light up as they rose to meet the angels."<sup>1</sup>

"He [Satan] leads men into skepticism, causing them to lose confidence in God and to separate from His love; he tempts them to break His law, and then he claims them as his captives and contests the right of Christ to take them from him. He knows that those who seek God earnestly for pardon and grace will obtain it; therefore he presents their sins before them to discourage them."<sup>2</sup>

"The more closely they [the people of God] view the spotless character of Christ, the stronger will be their desire to be conformed to His image, and the less will they see of purity or holiness in themselves. But while we should realize our sinful condition, we are to rely upon Christ as our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption. We cannot answer the charges of Satan against us. Christ alone can make an effectual plea in our behalf. He is able to silence the accuser with arguments founded not upon our merits, but on His own."<sup>3</sup>

1. Manuscript Release No. 1208.  
2. *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 470.  
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 471, 472.

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## Judgment at the Gate by Lyndon McDowell

### EVIDENCE

Key text:  
John 5:24

Can human courts and legal systems serve as a model of God's judgment? Some would give an emphatic "No" in reply. Our courts are sometimes corrupt. Often there is a miscarriage of justice. The very system is totally foreign to God's character.

However true these objections may be, one thing is clear, God does use human institutions to illustrate heavenly truths. The marriage institution is used to illustrate God's love for us, as well as our often fickle relationship to Him, and there are close parallels between the Mosaic laws and the code of Hammurabi. God does not deal with us in a vacuum. He speaks to us through the social institutions with which we are familiar. The Bible portrays what we call "the pre-advent investigative judgment" in terms of a court scene. God is the judge. "The Ancient of Days was seated" (Dan. 7:9). "The Ancient of Days is God the Father."<sup>1</sup>

There are the witnesses, or, if you like, the jury. "A thousand thousands ministered to Him. . . . The court was seated, and the books were opened" (7:10). Holy angels "as ministers and witnesses . . . attend this great tribunal."<sup>2</sup> This is probably identical with the heavenly council where "the commanders of the angelic hosts, the sons of God, the representatives of the unfallen worlds, are assembled. The heavenly council before which Lucifer had accused God and His Son, the representatives of those sinless realms over which Satan had thought to establish his dominion."<sup>3</sup>

The psalmist wrote of this council. "God [is] greatly feared in the council of the holy ones, and awesome above all those who are around Him" (Ps. 89:7, 8, NASB). Satan is also there. He is called "the accuser of our brethren" (Rev. 12:10), who seeks to win a verdict of guilty against God's people and claim them as his followers.

These pictures God gives us are pictures to which we can relate. They illustrate who the actors are in the great drama of salvation and what part each actor plays. When we reign with Christ and judgment is finally given to us during the millennium the reality may be quite different from the pictures we have formed in our minds, but who will quarrel over that? The pictures are to help us in the here and now. "Now we see through a glass darkly," but then we will see clearly.

One thing is sure. There is a judgment. We will be held accountable for our deeds (Eccl. 12:14; Matt. 12:36). Jesus taught this in a number of ways. In the parable of the wedding feast He illustrated how the gospel invitation was given to the Jews by Himself and His disciples, then later, after His crucifixion, by the apostles, who were ill treated and imprisoned. Next the gospel went to the Gentiles and then, finally, He tells how the king came to examine the guests to see whether they had been clothed with the garment provided by the king.

Jesus also commanded His disciples to preach the judgment. In his sermon to Cornelius, Peter said, "He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to

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be Judge of the living and the dead' " (Acts 10:42). The disciples took this command seriously. Paul faced the philosophers of Athens with a clear message: "He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world' " (Acts 17:31), and he stood undaunted before Felix when he "reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come" (24:25).

Surely the world needs just such a message today. People act as if there were no accountability. In these days when sin is practiced in its grossest forms people must be told to fear God for "the hour of His judgment has come" (Rev. 14:12).

But with the warning of judgment there is always the invitation of mercy. Peter made that clear to Cornelius. "To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins' " (Acts 10:43). The "everlasting gospel" always goes hand in hand with the judgment message.

The investigative judgment is to show why you and I may share a place in the kingdom. In Daniel 7 God is pictured as judge and Jesus is pictured as the advocate who pleads for His people in the face of Satan's accusations; and because we have accepted Christ, we are declared innocent (Dan. 7:22, NIV). Later, in Scripture Jesus is also referred to as judge (John 5:22).

The story of Ruth helps to illustrate the nature of the judgment. The city gate was the court of appeal. The elders were the jury. The court was established to deliver the oppressed, to restrain the wrongdoer and to establish righteousness in the city. Ruth, a poor Moabitess, by law excluded from the assembly of the people "even to the tenth generation" (Deut. 23:3), had nothing to offer, but she found a kinsman-redeemer and cast herself at his feet, claiming his protection. Once she had made her appeal he would not rest until the matter was settled. Before the witnesses he offered her redemption, a redemption so full and so complete that she became a progenitor of Christ. So with us. The law was against us. We were aliens. We had nothing to offer, we had no claim to our lost inheritance. But when we cast ourselves at the feet of our Kinsman-Redeemer He will not rest until our salvation is secured.

Without Christ there is no escaping a "guilty" verdict. We will have to give account for "every idle word" and "every secret thing." But with Christ we can have absolute confidence that we will "not come into judgment" (John 5:24).

The choice is ours.

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1. *The Great Controversy*,  
p. 479.  
2. *Ibid.*  
3. *The Desire of Ages*,  
p. 834.

# Innocent

by Lyndon McDowell

## HOW TO

**Key text:**  
Zechariah 3:1-4

Computers have revolutionized my concept of the judgment. When Daniel wrote, "The judgment was set, and the books were opened" (7:10, KJV), the books he saw may have been cuneiform tablets made of baked clay. When John the Revelator spoke of the books of record, he probably saw papyrus scrolls with clumsy wooden handles. Ellen White wrote of books—books that probably looked like the large family Bible that can be seen in the White Estate vault.

Let's go modern. Instead of tablets or scrolls or heavy ledgers, what about micro chips, floppy disks, and a monitor that reaches across the universe for all to see.

Every day, for good or ill, my deeds, my words, and my every thought is entered in God's great computer and stored on a floppy disk that bears my name. Then comes the judgment. My name is called. The recording angel's fingers flash across the keys. The "get/save/remove" button is touched. The "get" mode is selected. The floppy disk with my life record is selected. I watch with horror. My sinful life record is about to be displayed before the watching universe. Where can I hide? With fiendish glee Satan waits expectantly. He knows every sin he has led me to commit. He relishes every shameful deed that I have done. He waits to claim me as his own.

But wait, I have confessed my sins. I have accepted Jesus as my saviour. My "advocate with the Father" hands the angel a floppy disk. His majestic voice rolls through the vast assembly. "Is this not a brand plucked from the burning?" The angel inserts the disk and closes the gate. The return button is pressed. The computer drive whirls. Silent, the ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands watch with expectation. The screen lights up line by line and a great murmur of praise surges through the great assembly. My name is there, but I see coming on the screen, not my broken promises, not my life of sin and shame, but a perfect life. A life that is "without fault before the throne of God" (Rev. 14:5). My good deeds (accomplished only by the grace of God at work in my life) are seen, but my sins have been forgiven. All have been covered by the blood of Jesus. There is no evidence that Satan can use against me.

The verdict of the court is read. "Innocent. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

## REACT

1. When you have sensed that you were out of a right relationship with God, what were some of the feelings you experienced in the light of the coming judgment?

2. When you turned to God in repentance, what did you experience? What kind of feelings do you now have about the coming judgment?

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# The Investigative Judgment

by Lyndon McDowell

For many years our major reference for the "investigative judgment" was the chapter by that title in the book *The Great Controversy*. Few took the trouble to study the chapter closely to see what it really said, and for many struggling people the chapter was depressing. Take a look at some of the statements.

"Opposite each name in the books of heaven is entered with terrible exactness every wrong word, every selfish act, every unfulfilled duty, and every secret sin, with every artful dissembling."—Page 482.

"Our acts, our words, even our most secret motives, all have their weight in deciding our destiny for weal or woe. Though they may be forgotten by us, they will bear their testimony to justify or condemn."—Pages 486, 487.

Taken in isolation, these statements seem to present God as an accuser searching to find defects that would exclude us from heaven. For some people there appeared to be only two courses open: either continue desperately striving for perfection in the hope that somehow, at the last moment, they would squeak by, or simply give up and go out. Too many took the latter course.

But there is another alternative—read and understand the chapter properly.

The chapter is full of encouragement for those who have accepted Jesus as their personal Saviour, but the tendency in the past has been to emphasize the second part of the chapter, which deals with those who have been careless and indifferent and have despised the grace so freely offered by Christ. These "will see how often were given to Satan the time, thought, and strength that belonged to Christ," page 487, and when sentence is passed there will be a great "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 22:13).

God is always the loving Father, never the accuser. The psalmist was right, "The mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting" (Ps. 103:17). Satan is the one who accuses.

Not only does he accuse but he seeks to lead into sin. Notice how he works: "While Jesus is pleading for the subjects of His grace, Satan accuses them before God as transgressors. The great deceiver has sought [1] to lead them into skepticism, [2] to cause them to lose confidence in God, [3] to separate themselves from His love, and [4] to break His law. Now he points to the record of their lives, to the defects of character, the unlikeness to Christ, which has dishonored their Redeemer, to all the sins that he has tempted them to commit, and because of these he claims them as his subjects."—Page 484.

But Christ responds: "He lifts his wounded hands before the Father and the holy angels, saying: I know them by name. I have graven them on the palms of My hands. . . . Christ will clothe His faithful ones with His own righteousness, that He may present them to His father 'a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.'"—Page 484.

Thus our hope is not in ourselves or in the righteousness that we can produce apart from Christ our Saviour.

## OPINION

Key text:  
Psalm 103:17

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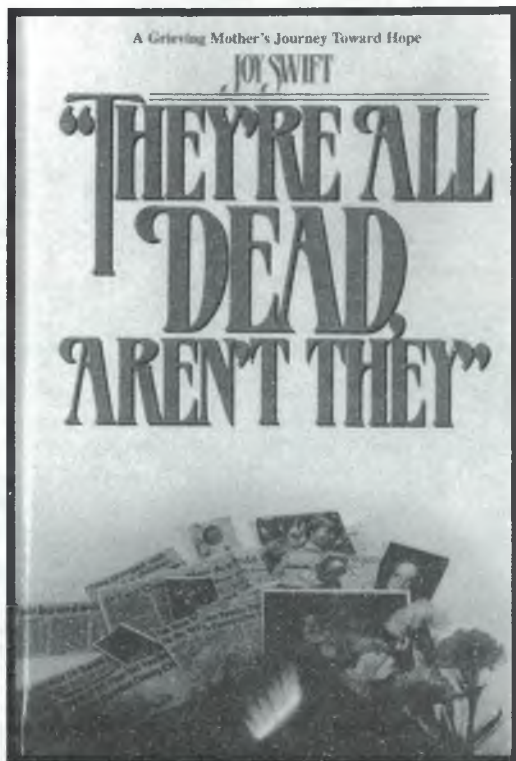
"All who have truly repented of sin, and by faith claimed the blood of Christ as their atoning sacrifice, have had pardon entered against their names in the books of heaven; as they have become partakers of the righteousness of Christ, and their characters are found to be in harmony with the law of God, their sins will be blotted out, and they themselves will be accounted worthy of eternal life."—Page 483.

But there is more. "He asks for His people not only pardon and justification, full and complete, but a share in His glory and a seat upon His throne."—Page 484.

The lesson is clear. It is written in bold paragraphs. We need to have a relationship with Jesus Christ. We must have Him as our Saviour. Without Him we can never stand against the accusations of Satan or pass the scrutiny of the heavenly Judge. But with Him we need have no fear, for **HE IS OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS**.

Christ does not demand our self-made perfection, He invites our surrender.

# "They're All Dead, Aren't They"



If you read only one book this year, it should be this book! This is the powerful autobiographical story of Joy Swift and her family. Awful tragedy unexpectedly struck this poor but happy family. This book is the stunning story of that tragedy and the tenacious search by this grieving young mother for meaning and hope. Without a doubt the most powerful book to come from Pacific Press in many years. Don't miss it! Hardbound with an attractive slip jacket. 223 pages. **Special Introductory Price US \$9.95.** Regular Price US \$13.95.

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Lesson 6, November 1-7

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# Who's in Your Shoes

“ ‘For your Maker is your husband—the Lord Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth’ ” (Isaiah 54:5, NIV).





# Who Is My Kinsman?

by Victor F. Brown

Shortly after Laurie and I were married, her brother asked us whether we would be willing to be the guardians of his two boys in the event he and his wife died. Feeling flattered, we agreed. Later this agreement provided fuel for many discussions. The responsibility if we were called upon would involve risks and sacrifice. We wondered whether we were the best ones to accept this responsibility. Thankfully, for all involved, our brother's will has not been executed. Now that we have two boys of our own we have asked him and his wife to be the guardians of our boys in case of our death.

The above situation, like that of Boaz, involves family. When it comes to family we are willing to accept responsibility. How about our church family? When the nominating committee calls with a request to lead out with the earliteens, what is the response? All too often it goes something like this: "No, I can't take on any other responsibilities," or "I'll help, but I don't want to be responsible." Who is my kinsman? Do I have a responsibility to redeem the youth in Sabbath School or the children in cradle roll?

Is it too great a leap to jump

from blood family to church family? Is it right to reason that responsibilities inherent in our blood family are similar to our responsibilities for our church family? If this is right, what about our responsibility to the family of humanity? At this point we may wish to take the way of the nearer kinsman and decline to be involved, because of the risks and cost.

In Luke 10 when the lawyer asked, "Who is my neighbor?" he asked the question many ask today. The implication of the question was Whom can I leave out? Jesus answers by telling the story of the good Samaritan. Whereas the lawyer's question suggested *exclusivism*, Jesus' answer pointedly calls for *inclusivism*. Whether it be blood family, church family, or the family of humanity, our obligations are similar. Our example is the One who redeemed the world.

In this week's lesson Boaz and the nearer kinsman are placed in contrast. The unnamed closest relative, because of the costs and risk, is unwilling to do what Boaz is eager to do. In this contrast we see the larger issue. Who is willing to take responsibility, to redeem something or someone no matter the cost?

**INTRO-  
DUCTION**  
Scripture:  
Ruth 4:3-12

# "Redemption at the Gate"

by Douglas R. Clark

**LOGOS** Theme: The account of the hearing at the gate provides us with an exquisite illustration of Old Testament thinking about "redemptive" activity, while causing us to reflect upon the salvation brought by another Kinsman from Bethlehem.

## 1. The Next of Kin (read Ruth 4:3, 4)

*"If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if you will not, tell me, that I may know, for there is no one besides you to redeem it, and I come after you"* (Ruth 4:4, RSV).

Verses 3 and 4 introduce us to the most intensive use in the book, and nearly in the entire Old Testament, of the Hebrew root-word, *ga'al* ("to redeem, to act as kinsman").<sup>1</sup> Uses of the related nouns, *go'el* ("redeemer, kinsman"), occur in Naomi's joyful discovery that Ruth's provider and protector is "kinsman" Boaz (2:20) and in Ruth's request for the protective covering of Boaz's skirt during the intriguing night scene at the threshing floor (3:9-13). Fifteen of the sixteen remaining occurrences in the book appear in 4:1-8, with six in verse 4 alone.

Although it has secular and religious connotations, the word has to do with "restoring, repairing." Later Old Testament usage suggested the idea of "setting free, liberating." As it occurs in Ruth, however, it refers primarily to the act of rescuing a relative from some sort of misfortune or to the one who performs the redeeming activity. This "redeemer" or "kinsman" had responsibilities ranging from repurchasing property for indebted relatives through the reacquisition of enslaved family members to avenging, according to laws governing clan justice, the murder of a fellow tribesman. Guilt and redemption were family affairs and were taken seriously, as the story of Achan and his household makes painfully clear (Joshua 7).

Another point of interest arises regarding "kinsman" at this juncture. Numerous Old Testament passages outside the book of Ruth bring to mind the idea of God as "kinsman/redeemer." Particularly is this the case in discussions about the exodus from Egyptian bondage and, later, from Babylonian exile. The Lord champions the cause of His own people, especially in times of oppression. He is the next of kin who makes it His business to protect and avenge. It is the God of Israel "under whose wings" Ruth has "come to take refuge" (2:12, NKJV). He stands by, ready to ward off wolves at the door, because He is family.

*What other Biblical metaphors describe the relationship between humankind and God in terms of family? What special emphases/nuances do these convey?*

## 2. An Opportunity Rejected (read Ruth 4:5, 6)

*"Then the next of kin said, 'I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it'"* (Ruth 4:6, RSV).

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It is very interesting to reflect upon what the author of Ruth must have thought of Naomi's nearest remaining kinsman. His appearance in the story is brief and fairly lackluster. He moves off the stage even more quickly than he appeared. This man in a women's story scarcely merits passing notice, even though he is the one who will determine the fate of these women. Despite, or perhaps because of, his role as foil against Boaz's plans to obtain Ruth, he does not rate so much as a name in the narrative. In fact, the rare Hebrew form identifying him in verse 1 is likely best translated "so-and-so."<sup>2</sup> He was simply a so-and-so . . . so to speak.

Add to this less than noble appellation the fact that, for some reason, "So-and-so" was totally ignorant of the connection between the women and the property, a nearly incredible situation in light of the nature of small communities and family ties. Upon his discovery of the circumstances involving Ruth, the kinsman further alienates himself from the characters and from the readers by refusing to protect his relatives. He opts, rather, to protect his own interests against the economic drain upon his resources the inclusion of more women would imply.

Following the finalizing of this decision, Mr. So-and-so then disappears from the story, from history, and from the redemptive ancestry of David.

*What other Biblical characters come to mind who were confronted with a dilemma like that of Mr. So-and-so? Can you think of any recent decisions you, or someone you know, had to make involving choices between people and possessions?*

### **3. Ruth Redeemed (read Ruth 4:7-12)**

*"Also Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brethren and from the gate of his native place; you are witnesses this day" (Ruth 4:10, RSV).*

The verses about the confirming of Boaz's "purchase" of Ruth and Naomi's property both raise fascinating questions about ancient practices and begin to bring the story itself to a warm and happy conclusion. At one and the same time, this section teases and satisfies the reader.

We are not yet in a position to know exactly what Mr. So-and-so's sandal swap really meant in its ancient setting. In fact, verse 7 seems to be an explanatory note even for very early readers. In this context, however, some perceptions from the laws of Moses do come to mind. Leviticus 25:25 speaks of the responsibility of a poor man's kinsman, when hard times come, to redeem his relative's property. Unfortunately, nothing appears about sandals.

The only other instance in which a sandal plays a significant role occurs in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. Here the system of Levirate

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marriage is described. In order to ensure family and clan survival, the law required the next younger brother of a man who had died and whose wife remained childless to perpetuate the older brother's name by marrying his widow and attributing fatherhood of at least the first son to the brother's name.

In cases where the surviving brother objects, the law in Deuteronomy 25 makes provision for the refusal to abide by this arrangement by shaming him publicly at the gate in the presence of the elders. If the brother persists, against the urging of the elders, in resisting the performance of his responsibility, the wife shall approach him, "pull his sandal off his foot, and spit in his face," extending to him a curse for his negligence or calculated indifference. (Although the sandal ceremony is not mentioned in Genesis 38, Onan discovered the hard way what it means to violate these rules.) Many similarities exist between this reference and the custom noted in Ruth, but not all details match completely.<sup>3</sup>

Certainly of greater significance for the story, however, and for us, as well, is the way the Ruth narrative begins to end in the scene at the gate. More important than our no-name character (he may still be standing at the gate counting his money) and his refusal to fulfill his obligations are insights from the trajectories of the story itself that begin to focus on what is really of lasting value.

Love stands out here. From the shadows of ancient laws and regulations there emerge people, people whose love story the book is all about. The tenderness, warmth, and earthy simplicity of human affection apparent in the narrative remind us of people priorities, of the value of relationships in overcoming seemingly insurmountable obstacles. What God can't do when He puts people together!

In addition, the author of the book prepares his readers in this section for redemptive reversals from the earlier portions of the story. Where once there was famine, there now is the anticipation of plenty. Fullness replaces emptiness. Barrenness gives birth to the promise of a son to carry on the family name. Lives devoid of meaning find satisfaction. Hopelessness fades before a new dawn of assurance. Joy begins to eclipse bitterness. Two women in a "man's world" work, with love, divine assistance, and help from their "redeemer," to find themselves and, in the process, help us to find ourselves.

*According to the book of Ruth, how do human activity and divine providence coalesce? Where does one stop and the other begin? Or, is this a false dichotomy? How can one know?*

1. H. Ringgren, "Ga'al," in G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmann, 1975 [Revised, 1977]), vol. II, pp. 350-355. This article has provided most of the information for our discussion about the use of *ga'al/go'el*.

2. E. F. Campbell, *Ruth*, The Anchor Bible, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), vol. 7, pp. 141-143.

3. See Campbell, pp. 149, 150, 160, for a fuller discussion of this custom.



# Ruth— A Devoted Searcher

by Charlene Burton

**TESTIMONY**
**Key text:**  
**Ruth 4:9, 10**

Ruth took a big risk. Imagine yourself a widow, destitute and with no method of support. Then you leave your familiar home to go to a strange country and be surrounded by people who are your traditional enemies. Ruth did all this because she possessed a love and devotion so complete that it has become an example for lovers through all the centuries.

However, God doesn't leave His people destitute. Long before Ruth's time He outlined a plan that included a method of providing for widows such as she. "Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, 'Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon's widow, as my wife in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from the town records'" (Ruth 4:9, 10, NIV).

In accordance with Mosaic law, Boaz, a near kinsman, married Ruth and bought her dead husband's property, thus providing her once again with a home and security.

Ruth's story has many lessons for Christians today. We are God's people in a strange land. We have no merits of our own, but "God has made every provision to bring salvation within our reach, but He will not thrust it upon us against our will. He has laid down conditions in His word, and we should diligently, interestedly, with heart and mind, set about the task of learning these conditions, lest we make some mistake and fail to secure our title to the mansions above."<sup>1</sup>

Ruth's story is also an example of diligence and work. "The work of gaining salvation is one of copartnership, a joint operation. There is to be cooperation between God and the repentant sinner. This is necessary for the formation of right principles in the character. Man is to make earnest efforts to overcome that which hinders him from attaining to perfection. But he is wholly dependent upon God for success. Human effort of itself is not sufficient. Without the aid of divine power it avails nothing. God works and man works. Resistance of temptation must come from man, who must draw his power from God. On the one side there is infinite wisdom, compassion, and power; on the other, weakness, sinfulness, absolute helplessness."<sup>2</sup>

Ruth's redemption came by the grace of a kinsman. We also have a Kinsman who offers salvation. "This cup of salvation the Lord offers us, while with His own lips He drained, in our stead, the bitter cup for which our sins had prepared, and which was apportioned for us to drink."<sup>3</sup>

**REACT**

Since God's church no longer practices the custom of marrying widows as a method of providing for them, how do you think He wishes us to take care of the poor among us today?

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 543.  
 2. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 482.  
 3. *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 590.

Charlene Burton is a communication major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

# “Ruth Was No Shoe-in!”

by Ron Jolliffe

## EVIDENCE Key text: Ruth 4:5, RSV

Moab is a four-letter word. Maybe you were unaware that Moab should be spoken with a hiss. It is foul and vile, or at least it was. Moab belonged to a xenophobic (hating foreigners) list similar to much of the contemporary bigotry that exists today. Deuteronomy 23:3, 4 made Moab part of such a list, even forbidding any Moabite from coming to church because they had not assisted Israel in the Exodus from Egypt (Numbers 22:1-6).

Bigotry lasts. Centuries later Moab is still despised. After returning from Babylonian captivity the children of Israel excluded all foreigners from their community after reading this prohibition against Moab (Nehemiah 13:1-3). We still have a list of the husbands who divorced their foreign wives at that time (Ezra 10:18-44).

The book of Ruth evokes a creative tension within this well-established pattern. No less than 14 times in this short book reference is made to Ruth's homeland. No reader, aware of the hatred toward Moabites, could read the book without noticing that Ruth is one of those Moabites. Perhaps this is why the nearer of kin refuses to redeem the property with the explanation "lest I impair my own inheritance" (4:6, RSV).<sup>1</sup>

Verse 7 makes it clear (as do verses 17-21 also) that the book of Ruth is written some time later than the time of the Judges in which the story is situated, and enough later that it is necessary to explain a forgotten legal practice of closing a contract by removing one's shoe and giving it to the other party in the agreement. Some have suggested that Ruth was probably written after the exile in order to refute "the narrow outlook of a Nehemiah who required the Jews to divorce foreign wives."<sup>2</sup> Although an interesting thesis, it is neither provable nor unprovable. However, regardless of when it is dated, this book exists in some tension with the passages in Deuteronomy, Ezra, and Nehemiah, for not only does the conclusion seem to delight in the fact that this Moabite is an ancestor of the great King David, but even Matthew in tracing the genealogy of Jesus specifically mentions Ruth in his list.

What is one to make of this anomaly? I would suggest at least two lessons.

First, Scripture, while certainly God's word, is at the same time also the reflection of humans about God's will. In the Bible degrees of understanding vary from topic to topic, person to person, and time to time. We therefore need all of Scripture to see as clearly as possible.

Second, Ruth provides an important statement that affronts our prejudicial lists. The one who truly hears Ruth can no longer harbor racial hatred. Ruth belonged to a group that was never to be permitted to join God's people (Nehemiah 13:1) yet became a mother to its greatest leaders.

1. Of course other matters could be the cause of jeopardizing his own inheritance. One example of a condition that could cause an inheritance to be forfeited is found in a Mesopotamian legal document in which a man, Nashwi, adopted a man, Wullu, as his son (possibly in order to sell him a piece of land which he could not legally transfer to a non-family member). As part of the conditions of the sale, Wullu must provide food and clothing to Nashwi and marry his daughter Nuhuya. Upon Nashwi's death the property will then belong to Wullu. There is, however, one clause in the contract similar to Ruth 4:6, which says, "if Wullu takes another wife he shall forfeit the lands and buildings of Nashwi."

— "Sale-Adoption," James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), p. 168.

2. J. T. Cleland, in *Interpreter's Bible*, vol. II, p. 851.

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Ron Jolliffe is an assistant professor of religion at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

# Maneuvered or Manipulated?

by Victor F. Brown

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**Ruth 3:11-13**

At the end of chapter three Boaz sends Ruth back to Naomi with the promise that if the nearer kinsman will not redeem them, he will. Boaz wants the right of redemption, but he must first offer the right to the nearer kinsman. To achieve his objective, does Boaz manipulate the nearer kinsman?

I believe that from the way Boaz achieves his objective we can learn valuable lessons. When sitting on committees, at the work place, or in personal relationships it's often easy to manipulate those around us to forward our agenda. The following are a few of the lessons derived from this passage.

**1. Make sure key players are involved.** Often it's easier not to involve certain people when you are trying to get what you want. You fear they might raise too many objections or you know they will oppose you. If this person is a key player, not including him or her might allow you to have success at first, but in the long run will hurt your efforts. Boaz might not have had the nearer kinsman present with the elders and might have tried to make a case for himself being the nearest kinsman or might have said that the nearer kinsman was not qualified to redeem the inheritance.

**2. Have impartial witnesses present.** Many times we make decisions with the help of few counselors. The more public the effects of our decisions, the more important it is to have witnesses present. Rather than going to the nearer kinsman privately, Boaz makes his case in front of the elders. In this way he assured the integrity of the agreement and the acceptance of the community.

**3. Resist the idea that "the ends justify the means."** This is probably the easiest trap to fall into. We don't have to outright lie. We can merely not tell all of the truth or shave it just a little. It's easy to rationalize that if the end is so good the means really don't matter. There were many things Boaz could have said to turn off the nearer kinsman and assure Boaz getting Ruth.

**4. Be prepared to experience not having your way.** It's interesting to consider what Boaz might have done if the nearer kinsman had agreed to redeem the land and Ruth. It appears from the passage that Boaz was willing to let this happen.

There is no doubt that Boaz maneuvered the situation to achieve his wishes. But I don't think the nearer kinsman or the elders felt manipulated.

## REACT

What bearing do the methods of Boaz have on the way disputes within the church are handled?

---

Victor F. Brown is chaplain at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

# Of Sandals and Redemption

by David Yeagley

## OPINION

Key text:  
Ruth 4:7

The old men of Bethlehem probably whispered and cast questioning glances in the direction of Boaz as he leaned forward to grasp the sandal and claim his right as redeemer of the Moabite widow and her elderly mother-in-law. It was one thing to purchase a piece of land, but to marry a foreigner was not in line with the accepted Jewish traditions. Clouds of prejudice still hung over the people because of the frequent warfare between Moab and Israel.

Boaz, however, was not a man to be influenced by the traditions and prejudice of the day. His decision to become the redeemer of the household of Elimelech was based on his love for Ruth and her need for a redeemer. Unlike the nearest kinsman, he was not concerned with what would become of his own personal inheritance.

Because of this union, there was eventually born to the world another Redeemer. He was given the right to redeem not only a family line but the whole human race. And like Boaz, He was not concerned with the traditions and prejudice of His day. To Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, a Jew and Gentile were the same. He offered redemption freely to all because of His great love for fallen humanity.

As spiritual descendants of Christ, we have been given the right to tell the good news that we have been redeemed, not with a sandal, but by the blood of Christ. What a tragedy it would be if this glorious proclamation were to be hindered by the walls of prejudice.

The book of Ruth can easily be mistaken for merely a beautiful love story, when in fact it is a powerful statement that redemption is for all people. Jew or Gentile, black or white, Adventist or non-Adventist, all can be assured that they may be redeemed.

The world needs more people who, like Boaz, are willing to slice through the barriers that inhibit mankind's living together. It needs people who will look at everyone as equal because they have been redeemed by the death of Jesus Christ. The message of our Redeemer must be heralded to all the world regardless of race or religion.

The wedding bells rang for Boaz and Ruth and pealed out a message to all generations that God holds no person above another. If we allow those same bells to ring in our heart, just as they became a steppingstone to the First Advent through Boaz and Ruth, so, through us, they will become a stepping stone to the Second Advent.

## REACT

Does first Naomi's acceptance and then Boaz's acceptance of the Moabite Ruth harmonize with the way Adventists treat those not of our faith?

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## DEAR COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY READER

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# Skeletons in the Family Tree

"The women said to Naomi: 'Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel!' " (Ruth 4:14, NIV).





# The Story Lives On

by Dan Fahrbach

My hometown is in the extremely northern part of Michigan, an isolated town on the shores of Lake Superior. Winters come early to Munising, and they stay and stay.

For amusement, once or twice a winter, local citizens charter a bus and spend a Saturday riding several hundred miles through the frozen forests of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota to the World Theater in downtown St. Paul for an evening in the company of Garrison Keillor.

Mr. Keillor is the host of "A Praire Home Companion," a live radio broadcast of music, skits, and, most important, stories from a mythical town called Lake Wobegon. Exchange Lake Wobegon's Norwegians for the Finns of Munising, and people from Munising feel you are talking pretty much about the same place.

That busload of Munising people traveling cross-country to hear the news from Lake Wobegon demonstrates the power of a well-told story. Mr. Keillor's stories aren't thrillers. His stories are about ordinary people who do ordinary things—such as rent a bus and drive to St. Paul.

Yet in his stories the landscape seems to mean something. Tribal conversation communicates profound feeling. Rituals—private and communal—are seen to hold the world together. The lives of ordinary people glow and illuminate.

Mr. Keillor could do a good job telling the story of Ruth. The loose, meandering story matches his low-key style. In Ruth, we find very little of the conflict English teachers tell us is essential to a short story. One thing happens, then another. Yet, like the stories from Lake Wobegon, the story of Ruth takes surprising turns and is effortlessly spiritual. Unlikely people are revealed to have generous hearts and end up saying the most poetic things.

This week our study of Ruth ends. We learn that she has a child. We learn that she isn't so ordinary after all: she is the great-grandmother of King David.

Yet I think that the reason we will return to Ruth's story again and again is that we feel kinship with what is ordinary about her—her longings, needs, schemes, and dreams. It is a story that glows and illuminates.

**INTRO-  
DUCTION**  
Scripture:  
Ruth 4:13-22

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Dan Fahrbach, former editor of *Insight*, is an editor and writer from Allentown, Pennsylvania.

# A Grandson for Naomi, by Doug Morgan A Grandfather for David

**LOGOS** **Theme:** We may not understand all that happens in our lives, but we can know that there is a Redeemer who is in charge. Trust and faith in Him will enable us to live lives that reflect His will. With Jesus as our Saviour, we have nothing to fear.

## 1. New Hope for Naomi (read Ruth 4:13-16)

*"The women said to Naomi: 'Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a kinsman redeemer. . . . He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth'" (Ruth 4:14, 15, NIV).*

The story that opened with death and despair now concludes with the hope brought by new life. And the narrator now makes explicit what has been implicit all along—the hand of Yahweh at work in the everyday lives of His people.

Though we are earlier told that Yahweh is responsible for bringing food to His famine-stricken people (1:6) and though we may suspect that somehow He is behind the "chance" encounters between Ruth and Boaz (2:3) and between Boaz and the other potential kinsman-redeemer (4:1), only here in the story's conclusion do we learn that Yahweh Himself is responsible for the restoration of the fortunes of Naomi and Ruth.

Yet though God is the giver of the new life that brings hope, He has not done so through miraculous intervention or dramatic appearances, but through the human struggles of the cast of the story. In 2:12 Boaz wishes for Ruth the refuge of the divine wings, but it is under the wing of Boaz (3:9) that she and Naomi find the resolution of their predicament. Naomi calls upon Yahweh to grant security to Ruth (1:9), but it is Naomi who hatches a scheme to gain that security and Ruth who skillfully executes it (3:1-18). Yahweh causes Ruth to conceive, but it is Boaz and Ruth who make love (4:13, 14).

An ordinary if multifaceted human love story is thus the arena of divine activity. "God it is who brings about *shalom* in the context of this town," notes Edward Campbell, but it happens "through the caring responsibility of human beings for one another."<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Eliezer of the second century A.D. put it this way: "Boaz played his part, and Ruth played hers, and Naomi played hers, whereupon the Holy One blessed be He said, I too must play mine."<sup>2</sup>

The story of Ruth is the story of women struggling to make it in a "man's world," and so the women of the town appropriately have the final say on the significance of Ruth's baby boy. The elders at the city gate saw Boaz's action in marrying Ruth in strictly patriarchal terms. Boaz "acquires" Ruth along with the land in order to maintain the name of Elimelech and his heritage (4:9, 10).

But the women shift the emphasis from justice for dead males to justice for living females. Yahweh's action in bringing about a son is *for Naomi*—that her life might be renewed and sustained (verse 15).

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Doug Morgan is a graduate student in history of Christianity at the University of Chicago.

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The women also "speak of Ruth the bearer rather than of Boaz the begetter."<sup>3</sup> They declare that Ruth, though a woman and thus property in legal terms, is better, not just than one male child, but better even than the ideal number of sons—seven. Ruth is valued in this way because of her love—she is the only person in this carefully crafted love story who is made the subject of the verb "to love." And she has manifested this love in a strikingly radical way, given her social context. She committed herself to loving an old woman until the end of life (1:16, 17) and put that love ahead of the search for a husband, the normal path to security.

*What does Ruth's action teach us about the meaning of love?*

## **2. The Redemptive Context (read Ruth 4:17-22)**

*"The women living there said, 'Naomi has a son.' And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David" (Ruth 4:17, NIV).*

Though we tend to find genealogies the most boring part of Scripture, the author of Ruth really ends the story with quite a bang. The reference to David is no mere postscript. Rather, the author saves for the end the dramatic revelation that, through the lives and loves of these simple small-town folk, God was shaping the ancestry of Israel's archetypal king, David. God weaves the ordinary history of the faith-filled struggle of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz into His larger scheme of salvation history.

The ordinariness of life is thus charged with divine significance. And a genealogy lifts our perspective beyond the limits of one lifetime and helps us see that significance in its broad redemptive context.

Naomi, the embittered widow who summons the courage to go on and finally discovers the meaning of grace. Ruth, the alien who makes a radical commitment to another woman in a society where men hold all the power. Boaz, the man of means who goes beyond legal requirements to create justice for the vulnerable. Such constitute the line of humanity that produces David, bringer of peace and justice to Israel, and the Son of David, bringer of peace and justice to all nations.

*What does the story of Ruth teach us about the relationship between human and divine effort?*

1. Edward F. Campbell, *Ruth*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1975), p. 29.  
2. Cited in Grace Goldin, *Come Under the Wings* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1958), p. 7.  
3. Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 194.

## God's Resourcefulness by Doug Morgan

### TESTIMONY

Key texts:  
Ruth 1:20, 21;  
4:14-17

"Many who profess to be Christ's followers have an anxious, troubled heart, because they are afraid to trust themselves with God. They do not make a complete surrender to Him; for they shrink from the consequences that such a surrender may involve. Unless they do make this surrender, they cannot find peace.

"There are many whose hearts are aching under a load of care because they seek to reach the world's standard. They have chosen its service, accepted its perplexities, adopted its customs. Thus their character is marred, and their life made a weariness. The continual worry is wearing out the life forces. Our Lord desires them to lay aside this yoke of bondage. He invites them to accept His yoke; He says, 'My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.' Worry is blind, and can not discern the future; but Jesus sees the end from the beginning. In every difficulty He has His way prepared to bring relief. 'No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.' Matthew 11:30; Psalm 84:11.

"Our heavenly Father has a thousand ways to provide for us of which we know nothing. Those who accept the one principle of making the service of God supreme, will find perplexities vanish and a plain path before their feet.

"The faithful discharge of today's duties is the best preparation for tomorrow's trials. Do not gather together all tomorrow's liabilities and cares and add them to the burden of today. 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.' Matthew 6:34.

"Let us be hopeful and courageous. Despondency in God's service is sinful and unreasonable. He knows our every necessity. To the omnipotence of the King of kings our covenant-keeping God unites the gentleness and care of the tender shepherd. His power is absolute, and it is the pledge of the sure fulfillment of His promises to all who trust in Him. He has means for the removal of every difficulty, that those who serve Him and respect the means He employs may be sustained. His love is as far above all other love as the heavens are above the earth. He watches over His children with a love that is measureless and everlasting.

"In the darkest days, when appearances seem most forbidding, have faith in God. He is working out His will, doing all things well in behalf of His people. The strength of those who love and serve Him will be renewed day by day."<sup>\*</sup>

<sup>\*</sup>*The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 480-482.

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# Women in a Man's World

by Doug Morgan

Behind the genealogy in Ruth 4:18-22 lie the stories of three remarkable women: Tamar, mother of Perez; Rahab, wife of Salmon; and of course Ruth, wife of Boaz. When Matthew builds on this genealogy in establishing the ancestry of Christ, he includes a fourth woman of note—Bathsheba (Matt. 1:1-6).

At first glance it looks like pretty disreputable company for virtuous Ruth. Bathsheba was an adultress, Rahab a prostitute, and Tamar seduced her own father-in-law. Yet there they are together, the only four women Matthew chooses to mention in an otherwise all-male genealogy.

What do these women have in common and why are they there? What ties these four women together, I suggest, is that each engaged in a creative act of courage to preserve life and dignity for themselves and their families. In a society where women were property, their destinies determined by male authority, these women took the initiative. To be sure, they acted within the parameters of their culture, but they found creative, sometimes ingenious, ways of working the system on their own terms to establish new hope and significance for their lives and for those they loved.

Faced with the prospect of growing old as a widow without children, Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute and ensnared her father-in-law, Judah, into impregnating her. Her action is not exemplary for Christians, but the motive behind it may be. Strange as it may seem to us, Tamar's purpose was to cause Judah to act justly, to provide her with the heritage he had denied her by withholding from her his third son (see Genesis 38, especially verse 26).

Sensing that the side of the Hebrew God was the side to be on, Rahab took advantage of the patronage of the Israelite spies to strike a deal that saved her life and her family's (Joshua 2; Hebrew 11:31). Bathsheba, along with Nathan the prophet, prompted David to stir from his deathbed and squelch Adonijah's conspiracy and confirm the succession of Solomon to the throne (1 Kings 1). Ruth made risky breaks with convention by binding herself to the destiny of Naomi and by carrying out the scheme to get Boaz to act as kinsman-redeemer.

In the broad perspective of salvation history, each of these acts was indispensable in carrying along the sacred story. These women took bold, risky action that made a difference. Tamar became mother of the tribe of Judah, the tribe of David and Jesus. Bathsheba helped ensure that Solomon, not a prince of lesser caliber, became king. Rahab assisted in the conquest of Jericho. Ruth became David's great-grandmother. God blessed the initiative of these women in a "man's world" and used it in working out His purposes.

## REACT

What, if anything, do the stories of these four women suggest about the role of Christian women in today's society?

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Matthew 1:1-6

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## Knowing When You're "Said and Done" by Judy Rittenhouse

### HOW TO

**Key text:**  
**Job 13:15**

Naomi is overjoyed to tuck baby Obed into her bosom. Her friends sing praises to the same God whom Naomi was bitterly blaming when she was first widowed and bereft of her sons. One has to ask how it is that the same Lord takes the blame and gets the praise.

Every believer has this tension when fortune turns. Do you take your grievances to the same place you took your thanks? Many of the Bible stories—Job comes to mind—try to work it out. And every soul has to establish this relationship for himself or herself.

There are questions to ask in the process.

**1. Are you truly aware of your blessings, so you can put your reverses into perspective?** Naomi was so desperate in her plight that she didn't even register that Ruth had come along as an enormous blessing.

**2. Have your sad and horrible experiences ever yielded such blessings as sweet ministry from other people or new insight?** Loss and death abounded around Naomi, but Boaz did turn up.

**3. Has a terrible experience ever brought out your best characteristics?** After all, Ruth may never have known she could speak in poetry until she reached the border and started in with, "Entreat me not to leave thee . . ."

**4. If you are enduring something awful right now, is there anything anyone can do?** Is that person you? Is that person I? Is that the Lord? If not, then maybe it is time to sit in silence. Maybe there will be singing, or advice, later. Maybe not.

### REACT

John Milton wrote that those "who best bear his mild yoke, they serve him best." Why? And how would this apply to people like Ruth and Naomi who encounter difficult and trying circumstances?

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Judy Rittenhouse is a partner in a publishing company in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

# A Familiar Story

by Judy Rittenhouse

A Mexican woman named Ruth marries a man from the States. They live in Chihuahua, with his American mother, until the man dies, prematurely. Then his grieving mother tells her young Mexican daughter-in-law goodbye and heads back to Kansas City.

Except that Ruth begs to come along. She pledges allegiance to the American flag and the United States. She says she can be a Protestant and live where it snows. It comes out of her mouth as poetry. Did she prepare this speech as a calculated move for economic opportunity, or does she really like her mother-in-law a lot?

When they arrive at the American woman's former church in Kansas City the congregation is abuzz. Their poor sister was only a homemaker. She has no way to earn a living or support a Mexican. That's what they call Ruth—the Mexican. They expect her to be lazy and to take what she doesn't deserve.

The mother-in-law is too depressed to function. So Ruth gets a green card and food stamps. She finds a menial job. Her mother-in-law perks up. She suggests a bold measure.

And on that suggestion, Ruth dresses up and proposes marriage to the head elder of the congregation—a wealthy, elderly man. When she does this audacious thing, does she know that the man's own mother lived outside convention? Can she tell that for all his prestige, he too comes from a foreign family? Will the heart of one persecuted minority respond to the plight of another?

He is flattered and accepts. And later when they have a son, Ruth's mother-in-law is overjoyed. The women at church think she was lucky to have hooked up with that particular Mexican. You've got to hand it to Grandma, she has the Lord's favor.

But it is the Mexican who brings fresh genes to an inbred community, who contributes to a nation that grudgingly accepts aggressive foreigners who are looking for a chance.

It is a true story, and, as it is refined in telling, David's name emerges. Ruth went from being a migrant worker to seeing her great-grandson in the White House. What could be more like the America of our fondest hopes?

## REACT

Express some of the feelings you felt as you read this article.

## OPINION

Key text:  
Ruth 4:13

Lesson 8, November 15-21

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# No-Fault Divorce?

"I call to the Lord, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies" (Psalm 18:3, NIV).





# Who Are the Needy?

by James Gulley

## INTRO- DUCTION

Scripture:  
Esther 1:1; 2:4

I walked up to the church early one Sabbath morning  
searching for answers to the doubts my mind kept forming.  
"This church," I thought, "will be the place where I can find  
some peace,"  
and so I climbed up those long steep stairs, my head like  
churning seas.  
I slipped in through the big back door and shuffled through  
the room.

It was empty, dark and still—but with no trace of gloom.  
I slowly sank down to my knees and prayed a long, loud prayer,  
I could feel God's presence warming all around me there.  
I knew He didn't mind that my clothes were just rags,  
He gave me His sweet presence and my heart no longer sagged.  
But then the air was pierced by a loud and angry shout,  
"Look here, you bum—what are you doing? You best get  
yourself out."

I rose and said, "Sorry, sir, I didn't mean you harm,  
I just came to talk to God. There's no need for alarm."  
The man just said, "We loathe your kind, just move on out of here."  
So I ducked out through the back where many people were.  
At once the crowd parted as if I were diseased,  
I judged by looks and whispers that they were all displeased.  
Then said one, "Hey look, you hick, why were you in our church?"  
Answered I, "To look for God, and for His peace to search."  
"God don't like your kind," he whined in a thin and rasping voice.  
"He likes us mannered people, yes, we rich folks are His choice."  
As the crowd filed in the church that cold and dreary day,  
I knelt down in the parking lot and just began to pray.  
I said, "Oh, Lord, please give those folks what you gave to me,  
Give them love and kindness, encourage them to see  
That You can use the least, the lowest, the despised man,  
It matters not that he be rich, the whole world's in Your plan.  
So please help me be kind, be loving, and be true,  
Help my light to always shine and honor only You.  
Forgive those needy sinners and then help them to know  
That You look on the heart and not the outward show."

"God can take a nobody and make them into a somebody." This  
truth poignantly emerges in the lives of Esther and Mordecai as we  
will discover in this series of lessons. "The Lord does not look at the  
things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the  
Lord looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7, NIV).

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# Esther

by Jack J. Blanco

**LOGOS** **Theme:** No matter what our flaws or limitations, God can use each of us if we will submit to His leading. When He comes into the life He can transform hopelessness into victory, and sinners into heroes and heroines of faith.

## 1. Pomp and Power (read Esther 1:1-9)

*"For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty. When these days were over, the king gave a banquet, lasting seven days, . . ." (Esther 1:4,5, NIV).*

Ahasuerus (Xerxes I) inherited the vast Persian Empire from his father, Darius I, who had issued the second of three decrees permitting the Jews to finish rebuilding the Temple after their Babylonian captivity. The Persian Empire was the world's Middle East superpower extending from India to Ethiopia, covering an area of about 2 million square miles. Xerxes had proclaimed himself as "the great king, the king of kings, the king of the land of many tribes, the king on this wide far-stretching earth . . ." <sup>1</sup> Also the Persian Empire was the wealthiest nation of the time. And the sheer extravagance of the official wine-banquets at which as many as 15,000 guests were entertained made a deep impression on such nations as Israel and its writers. <sup>2</sup> Apparently during the 180 days of pomp and ceremony referred to in verse 4, the princes of the 127 provinces were called in, in relays, to prepare for Xerxes' invasion of Greece in retaliation for his father's defeat at Marathon in 490 B.C. <sup>3</sup>

## 2. The King and the Queen (read Esther 1:10-22)

*"Bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty; for she was fair to behold. But Queen Vashti refused to come . . ." (Esther 1:11, RSV).*

Why did the king on the last day of this week-long wine banquet want the queen to come to the banquet wearing her royal crown? And why did she refuse? Obviously she did not want to be put on display, nor did she want to be used as one of so many things to enhance the king's ego. "Jewish commentators early puzzled over this question, and with typical rabbinical ingenuity deduced from the text that the king commanded her to appear at his banquet naked, i.e., with only the royal crown on her head (so II Targum)." <sup>4</sup> To disobey a king is always a serious matter, but this was so particularly in Persia, and as the text says, the king's counselors advised him to remove the queen from her throne for her disobedience. Also according to the text the counselors had a personal interest in the case because they did not want their wives to assert their rights as Vashti did. They wanted them to continue to be subservient and be willing to be put on display to enhance their husband's career. Xerxes accepted their chauvinistic suggestion and made it a crime for a woman not to obey her husband at all times. In Matthew 14:6-10 we find an unfortunate parallel to inebriated Xerxes' rash decision.

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This time it was made by Herod Antipas, who ruled Galilee and Perea. It was his birthday, and he was having a party. He asked his stepdaughter to come in and dance. Salome complied, and because she pleased his guests he promised her anything up to half of his kingdom. She consulted her mother, Herodias, and on her suggestion asked for the head of John the Baptist, who was asleep in prison. The king was shocked, but not wanting to lose face, gave the order, and John was beheaded.<sup>5</sup>

The effects of alcohol on a person's behavior is self-evident. In these two Biblical instances a queen lost her crown and a prophet lost his life, and both because of kings whose decisions were influenced by wine. As the Scriptures point out, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise" (Prov. 20:1, KJV). Therefore, "Do not look at the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. . . . Your eyes will see strange things, and your mind utter perverse things" (Prov. 23:31-33, RSV).

*Ahasuerus' counselors made much of the effect on husband-wife relationships if the king did not take drastic action (Esther 1:15-22). What do you think would have been the result if Ahasuerus had acknowledged his mistake publicly and honored Vashti for living by her sense of integrity? Have you some time or other backed yourself into a position where pride would not let you seek a way out of it? Did your action hurt only yourself, or did it involve others?*

### **3. Defeated by the Greeks (read Daniel 8:1-7, 16-21)**

*"The ram which thou sawest having two horns are the kings of Media and Persia. And the rough goat [which cast the ram to the ground] is the king of Grecia . . ." (Dan. 8:20, 21, KJV).*

As we mentioned, Darius I suffered a terrible defeat at the hand of the Athenians at Marathon in 490 B.C. Xerxes, his son, who had successfully repressed a revolt in Egypt and a rebellion in Babylon, was now free to attack the Greeks in retaliation for his father's defeat. With a large army he passed over Asia Minor, crossed the Hellespont, and invaded the mainland of Greece. But in the naval battle of Salamis in 480 B.C. his fleet was overwhelmed, and he was compelled to limp back home with his tattered and weary army in defeat.<sup>6</sup>

The great feast in Xerxes' third year referred to in Esther, chapter 1, at which Vashti was deposed, was held shortly before he left on his disastrous expedition to Greece. Also the command to "gather together all the fair young virgins" was no doubt issued prior to his departure. And the selection of the most beautiful maidens from the 127 provinces was apparently completed before his return. Whether Xerxes regretted the decision he had made to depose Vashti before he left for Greece or after his return home is uncertain. Seemingly his desire for her returned and once more he longed for her beauty

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and comfort, but she was no longer in a position to console him as she had done before. But for him to reinstate her was impossible without admitting to her innocence and to the dismissal or even execution of the counselors who had proposed her humiliation.<sup>7</sup> According to the tradition of the empire, the laws of the Medes and Persians once made could not be changed. (See Daniel 6:8.)

*Might we be a little less hasty in making decisions if we knew that once the decision was announced it would be irrevocable?*

#### 4. Selecting a New Queen (read Esther 2:1-4)

*"And let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti" (Esther 2:4, KJV).*

The selection process of the most beautiful women from each of the provinces must have taken months. And before Xerxes arrived home from Greece, Esther and the other maidens had arrived at the palace.<sup>8</sup> It was now up to the king to select from the finalists the one to be crowned queen. Where was Vashti at this time? How was she relating to this whole process of selecting someone to take her place? According to her name she was "the desired one" and "the best one."<sup>9</sup> One cannot but admire her courage in making the decision she did, especially since she was aware of the consequences of disobeying the king. Vashti is the unsung heroine in the book of Esther, not only because she did not stoop to dishonor herself but also because many other women may have been encouraged by her example to brave the consequences of disobeying the one they loved rather than submitting to dishonor. As the Scripture says, "A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies" (Prov. 31:10, NIV).

*Is it not ironic that, in the light of Vashti's motives, she would be deposed and a queen sought who was "better"?*

*Does obedience and integrity always yield a positive reward?*

1. Jack Finegan, *Light From the Ancient Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), pp. 199, 200.
2. A. T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), chs. xii, xiii, xx.
3. Herodotus, *History*, 3.89; 7.8.
4. *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. III, p. 837.
5. See *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 221-223.
6. Schaff-Herzog *Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, vol. VII, p. 275.
7. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, pp. 460, 468.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 468.
9. *Ibid.*, "Vashti," vol. 8., p. 1147.



# Our Weakness— His Strength

by Karen Larsen

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Psalm 18:3

The Bible character Esther was confronted in her everyday life with major decisions, and especially the one concerning her own people, the Jews. She realized that in her own weakness she could not get through to King Xerxes, so she went to God in fasting and prayer. In our everyday lives, we need to realize our own limitations and submit to God's leading. Keep this theme in mind as you study the following.

"The steps of a Christian may at times appear feeble and faltering, yet in his conscious weakness he leans upon the Mighty One for support. He is sustained, and makes sure progress onward and upward toward perfection. He gains new victories daily, and comes nearer and nearer to the standard of perfect holiness. His eye is not downward to the earth, but upward, ever keeping in view the heavenly Pattern."<sup>1</sup>

"When we have a realization of our weakness, we learn to depend upon a power not inherent. . . . The more closely you connect yourself with the source of light and power, the greater light will be shed upon you, and the greater power will be yours to work for God."<sup>2</sup>

"If we could understand our own weakness, and see the sharp traits in our character which need repressing, we should see so much to do for ourselves that we would humble our hearts under the mighty hand of God. Hanging our helpless souls upon Christ, we should supplement our ignorance with His wisdom, our weakness with His strength, our frailty with His enduring might, and connected with God, we should indeed be lights in the world."<sup>3</sup>

"Those who look within for comfort will become weary and disappointed. A sense of our weakness and unworthiness should lead us with humility of heart to plead the atoning sacrifice of Christ. As we rely upon His merits we shall find rest and peace and joy. He saves to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him."<sup>4</sup>

"When harassed with temptations and evil thoughts, there is but One to whom you can flee for relief and succor. Flee to Him in your weakness. When near Him, Satan's arrows are broken and cannot harm you. Your trials and temptations borne in God will purify and humble, but will not destroy or endanger you."<sup>5</sup>

Esther's courage to go before the king was given to her after she went to the Lord in fasting and prayer. We, as Christians, can have that same courage if we will simply turn to the Lord in our weaknesses.

## REACT

How does Esther's story of submission to God's strength in her weakness apply to your life?

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 228.
2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 493.
3. *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 362.
4. *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 200.
5. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 93.

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# Trusting Because He Is Trustworthy

by Donald R. Sahly

## EVIDENCE

Key texts:

Esther 4:14 and  
Ezekiel 17:22, 23

Will God really preserve us if we put all in His hands? If we trust Him to care for us totally in times of danger and stress, should we stand passively and do nothing, or does God expect us to get actively involved in His working on our behalf?

It was the purpose of God, as it was from the beginning, that His people should bring praise, glory, and honor to His name. During their years of captivity God had provided many opportunities for His people to return to their allegiance to Him. Through the exile and separation from their Landlord some chose to listen and learn. It was these who chose to return to Jerusalem under the decree of Cyrus. Many chose to stay in Babylon and would not take the opportunities to return home provided by the decrees, nor did they heed the warnings of the prophet Zechariah.

Xerxes was induced to issue a decree through false statements. If Haman provided the stage for God again to save His people, who were the preservers of the knowledge of the true God?

The plot of God's enemy must be defeated, and in His providence God chose to use the men and women whom He ordained to do His work and to carry the torch of His light to those about them. He could have stepped in; He could have sent angels to carry out His plan. God chose a young Jewess, who through His providence had been made queen over the realm.

It was in Esther's power to refuse the work God had given her to do. Through his own faith Mordecai perceived the outworking of God's plan. Never had anyone faced a more challenging test of courage, loyalty, and self-sacrifice. Esther realized she not only represented those of her Jewish race, she also represented the citizenship of heaven. The challenge she faced and succeeded in accomplishing is no less real today. Our success, as hers, depends on our conscious confidence in God. We need the prayers of those around us. We too need time for communion with our God, the source of strength.

Her formula for success is simple. The right application of PRAYER, FAITH, AND ENERGETIC ACTION has never failed the children of God. It still works today. There is no fuel—outside the love of God Himself—that will power our lives more forcefully than to be better today than we were yesterday.

## REACT

Does it take more courage, faith, and energy to represent my God to those about me in meaningful ways than it did for Esther?

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Donald R. Sahly is president of Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Collegedale, Tennessee.

# Let's Hear it for Vashti by John Dysinger

For a week now the partygoers had been reveling in the biggest Persian bash anyone could remember. The entertainment had been superb, the music unexcelled, the food delectable, the wine exquisite.

Now the king's guests were sprawled all over the mosaic pavement or hanging off the gold and silver couches as the wine did its anesthetizing work.

In the middle of this scene sat King Xerxes slumped on his royal throne. Despite the groggy cloud developing in his head, he was feeling rather smug. After all, hadn't he just proved that he was the greatest and most powerful man alive? Hadn't he made sure that everyone experienced the full glory and splendor of his huge kingdom?

The king now sat wondering whether there was anything else he could do to top the events of the past week. How could he bring this royal feast to a climax? Finally a brilliant idea worked its way through his wine-sodden brain. Why not bring out his finest jewel, whose very name meant "beautiful woman," the gorgeous Queen Vashti, for all the drunken guests to feast their eyes on? What better way to end this banquet than to parade her stunning face and body before the lustful eyes of his guests!

Quickly King Xerxes called for Vashti to be brought in. His eunuch servants rushed to obey the king's command, but soon returned rather sheepishly. The queen refused to display herself. The king was outraged! No one violated his orders! Why did she refuse such a direct command? Didn't she know the results of disobeying the king? Well, it didn't take long for Xerxes' lawyers to recommend: "Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she" (Esther 1:19, NIV). Then came Esther, and the rest is history.

What a colorful story! But what does it have to do with life in the twentieth century? Despite her seemingly minor role in the book of Esther, I think we can gain valuable insights from the actions of Queen Vashti.

**1. Vashti refused to compromise her modesty and self-respect.** "What Ahasuerus [Xerxes] demanded was a surrender of womanly honor, and Vashti, who was neither vain nor wanton, was unwilling to comply. . . . It is to be regretted that in our modern world many women are not as careful as Vashti the pagan was in guarding the dignity of the body. Fashion and popularity are a poor price to pay for the loss of one's self-respect."<sup>1</sup>

**2. Queen Vashti was more concerned with being true to herself than with the results of her disobedience.** "Her self-respect and high character meant more to her than her husband's vast realm. Rather than cater to the vanity and sensuality of drunkards, she courageously sacrificed a kingdom."<sup>2</sup>

This pagan queen has set quite an example for Christians today; she has my vote for the unlikeliest heroine in the book of Esther.

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**Esther 1:10-12**

John Dysinger is a senior religion major at Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Collegedale, Tennessee.

1. Lockyer, Herbert. *The Women of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), p. 166.  
2. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

# God Is the Great Pencil Sharpener

by Laura Heinsman

## OPINION

Key text:  
Psalm 18:3

I hate writing with a dull pencil. Directly in front of me on the desk are two mugs: one loaded with tall, pointed yellow pencils, the other a storage facility for the stubby-tipped Dixon Trimlines.

But that is not all. It is not enough that I detest a pencil that writes a thick line, I also cannot bear to see anyone else writing with a worn tip. Whenever I am to make a trip to the beloved, life-saving pencil sharpener I find myself offering to sharpen other people's pencils, also. You would think that after all of this up and down I would tire of the traditional yellow wooden pencil and purchase one of the newfangled mechanical kind. With a click, you get another perfect point automatically. But I do not think I will ever switch—I have become attached to my wooden friends.

I believe that God feels the same way about us humans. Through His initial shaping, we are sharp, but slowly (and often not so slowly) our points become worn and blunt. We sit for a while in the "dull jar" until we realize that, unless we seek God's help we will not become keen. Instead, we will only become duller as we write out our history here on earth. Human beings are imperfect, like the wooden pencil that needs to be sharpened continually.

In this week's lesson we have learned that, no matter what our flaws or limitations are, God can use each of us if we will submit to His leading. When He comes into our lives, as He did with the hobo we read about on Sunday, He transforms hopelessness into victory, and sinners into heroes and heroines of faith.

God could have chosen to make us perfunctory robots, never needing sharpening like the mechanical pencil, but He did not. He would rather have our potentials the way they are, just as I prefer wooden pencils. I do not mind sharpening them. They are worth it.

---

Laura Heinsman is a senior English major at Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Collegedale, Tennessee.





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Lesson 9, November 22-28

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# Between a Rock and a Hard Place

"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death" (Proverbs 14:12, NIV).



# I Did It MY Way —Oops!

by Rhonda B. Dalusong

**INTRO-  
DUCTION**  
Scripture:  
Esther 2:5-23

"Machine wash cold water. Wash whites separately. Do not twist or wring." These were the instructions on my favorite red shirt.

Wash whites separately? Boy, so much hassle for one shirt! I'm on a college schedule, and I don't have time to be so picky doing my laundry. As it is, I barely find enough time to do one load, let alone two loads separately. I had only a few colored items in one pile (red shirt included), so I figured I could save time, effort, and money by washing the two piles together.

But what about my red shirt? If I did as the tag recommended I'd have to fuss with an additional load—all for the sake of what one label suggested. Besides, I reasoned with myself, the shirt had been washed several times before. Surely it could do no harm now if I combined both colors and whites together. So I did.

After a half-hour wait I walked confidently to the laundry room, dryer sheet in hand. One by one I pulled the clothes from the washer and tossed them into the dryer. I scanned each piece for any possible discoloration. So far so good.

Then I saw it. There, crunched between an oxford shirt and a pillow case, were my white dress slacks. I yanked them from the washer and stared, horrified at the pink splotches that stained my once-immaculate slacks. They were ruined! Ruined by my red shirt. But wait. Was this disaster caused by the shirt,

or was it by my own determination to ignore the washing instructions and launder the shirt MY way? If only I had followed the directions! I had that prerogative, but I rejected it. At that moment I felt like kicking myself, but I knew there was a lesson to be learned from this.

As my thoughts developed I realized that this incident can parallel the Christian life. As Christians, we need and want to be renewed. We want to be "cleansed," so to speak, and there's nothing wrong with that. However, we must realize that we can't insist on doing things using our own methods. We need guidance. We are given guidance—the Bible. It serves as our guide, our direction—our "washing instructions." God's Word offers the best instructions for our lives. Deliberately choosing not to follow these words will lead us into calamities. We then become tainted, as my pants were.

I still wear my red shirt, but not with the positive mental attitude I had before. It's no longer my favorite shirt, because it reminds me too much of how I ruined my white slacks. My stubbornness didn't pay.

Proverbs 14:12 states, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."

Instructions, whether taken from a laundry tag or received from above, are given for valid reasons.

Ask me. I know.

Rhonda B. Dalusong is a junior occupational-therapy student at Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Collegedale, Tennessee.

# Mordecai, Esther, and a Cast of Thousands

by Jerry A. Gladson

**LOGOS** Theme: Although Christians may find themselves facing difficulty, often that difficulty comes as a result of not having previously followed God's instructions.

## 1. Mordecai and Esther Introduced (read Esther 2:5-11)

*"He was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. Now the young lady was beautiful of form and face and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter" (Esther 2:7, NASB).*

After describing the abating of Xerxes' anger on account of the new plan to find a successor for the disgraced Queen Vashti (2:1-4), the author introduces Mordecai. Mordecai, a Jew from the Persian capital, Susa, is descended from the portion of the tribe of Benjamin carried into captivity during the Babylonian invasion of 597 B.C. Although verses 5 and 6 suggest Mordecai himself was captured, thus making him more than one hundred years old, the Hebrew syntax permits the clause "who had been carried away . . . among the captives" (RSV) to modify Shimei or Kish, Mordecai's ancestors. Interestingly, the name Mordecai (Marduka) has turned up on a cuneiform tablet now found in the Berlin Museum. This tablet lists Marduka as some sort of finance officer in the court of Xerxes I (485-465 B.C.), the Ahasuerus of Esther. Although nothing conclusively identifies this Marduka with our Biblical Mordecai, the tablet strengthens the case for the historicity of the story of Esther.

Esther, or Hadassah, "myrtle (?) [Heb.]," an orphan adopted into Mordecai's home, is a creature of striking beauty. When the fair maidens of the land are gathered by Xerxes' order, Esther naturally finds herself included. Curiously, at the court she does not make known her nationality, "for Mordecai had charged her not to make it known" (2:10, RSV). Cyrus Gordon explains this odd concealment on the basis of the Iranian custom of *kitman* or *taqiyya*, where an individual is allowed to deny his religion and pose as a member of another faith when faced with personal danger. Shiites do this today when on pilgrimage to Mecca among Sunnite Muslims, who have an antipathy toward them. Such dissimulation fits acceptably with Persian morality, although it raises the suspicion of Western readers. Later, confronted with the retaliation of the Israelites, many pagans adopted the same practice and "pretended themselves Jews" (8:17, lit. tran.).\*

*When, if ever, is it permissible to conceal the truth?*

## 2. The Contest for Queen, Its Results and a Celebration (read Esther 2:12-18)

*"The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found favor and kindness with him more than all the virgins, so he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti" (Esther 2:17, NASB).*

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Once assembled in the king's harem, the women underwent a six-month process of beautification utilizing all the available cosmetic and physical methods. Then, one by one, they went in to the king to test their powers of arousal and pleasure. Perhaps—if they could delight him enough—they would be queen!

The fact these women are called "concubines" and that they respond solely to the king's pleasure makes clear this is a somewhat typical Near Eastern royal harem. A mark of wealth and power, large harems, owing to their cost, were the privilege of kings, and usually consisted of a number of wives and concubines, of whom only one was favored. The practice here is similar to that of the Assyrians, where this approved woman was known as the "lady of the palace." Xerxes I, as a matter of fact, seems to have been eager to add to his harem whenever possible. Even when faced with military defeat, according to the Greek historian Herodotus, he had no compunctions about choosing any woman among his captives he fancied.

The king was delighted with Esther and makes her his queen.

A great banquet celebrates her victory. Modern readers, however, have trouble understanding the morality of Esther's winning of this "beauty contest" and her subsequent marriage to a pagan king, especially in view of Deuteronomy 7:1-5 and 2 Corinthians 6:14-16. The narrative does not moralize about the situation, but merely describes the way in which deliverance came about.

*In what situations does God use a less-than-perfect means of deliverance?*

*Is there a possibility that Esther may have captured the king's attention because she was different?*

### 3. Mordecai Discovers a Plot (read Esther 2:19-23)

*"Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai" (Esther 2:22, NASB).*

Having introduced the principal characters, except for Haman, who appears in Esther 3:1-6, the author now sets the mood for the remainder of the story. He relates a court conspiracy in which Bigthana and Teresh, two royal eunuchs, lay plans to assassinate Xerxes. Mordecai, getting wind of their conspiracy, relates the matter to Esther who, in turn, tells the king. Bigthana and Teresh soon found themselves gruesomely impaled ("hanged on the gallows") according to a standard Persian mode of execution. Palace intrigue, conspiracy, betrayal, and loyalty of the most persistent kind mark the tone of the story that follows.

*This is an ancient case of what we would call "whistle blowing." What Christian principles govern whistle blowing?*

\*Introduction to  
Old Testament Times  
(Ventnor, N.J.: Ventnor  
Publishers, 1953),  
pp. 278, 279.

# Caution! Proceed With Him

by Lisa Hall

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Proverbs 14:12

Esther is an excellent example of someone who stayed close to the Lord even though she had every worldly comfort at her fingertips. She followed what the Lord told her and was victorious over a "tight" situation. Think about the following passages and see how the Lord's advice and plan can keep us from finding ourselves "between a rock and a hard place."

"In every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes" (Esther 4:3). The decree of the Medes and Persians could not be revoked; apparently there was no hope; all the Israelites were doomed to destruction.

"But the plots of the enemy were defeated by a Power that reigns among the children of men. In the providence of God, Esther, a Jewess who feared the Most High, had been made queen of the Medo-Persian kingdom. Mordecai was a near relative of hers. In their extremity they decided to appeal to Xerxes in behalf of their people. Esther was to venture into his presence as an intercessor. 'Who knoweth,' said Mordecai, 'whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?' (verse 14).

"The crisis that Esther faced demanded quick, earnest action; but both she and Mordecai realized that unless God should work mightily in their behalf, their own efforts would be unavailing. So Esther took time for communion with God, the source of her strength."<sup>1</sup>

The Lord did not let Esther down; she came out of a situation that had seemed so hopeless, a victor and won the battle for her people. Following the Lord's leading from the beginning can save us much heartache and trouble.

"God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning, and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him."<sup>2</sup>

In our daily lives we become so busy that we forget to stay close to the Lord; we forget that our way is not always God's way. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12). When we forget or ignore God's advice we must pay the consequences and in many cases we may find ourselves stuck "between a rock and a hard place." The Lord is always there for us though, and He gives us this hope, "But my God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19).

## REACT

When God brought the Hebrews out of Egypt, He forbade them to intermarry with the heathen. Yet in the providence of God, Esther marries an uncircumcised Gentile king. Does this suggest that God's will at times may surprise us? That we should be careful in presuming that we know what He intends should be done in every circumstance?

1. *Prophets and Kings*,  
p. 601.  
2. *The Desire of Ages*,  
pp. 224, 225.

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# Making the Right Choices

by Stanley Kristian Hickman

In the story of Esther we find a very intelligent and obedient girl who is blessed because of her intelligent obedience. This obedience was to the advice from Mordecai and the eunuch Hegai. Esther's success with the king was based upon her wisdom in accepting the good advice of Mordecai.

Now Esther was not simply accepting anyone's advice. She was listening to the man who had reared her after her parents had died. She was listening to a man who had always demonstrated his concern for her best interest. Mordecai had always shown that he could be trusted. So it was logical for Esther to follow the advice of one who had always directly taken care of her in the past.

Every real Christian desires to know what God wants him or her to do. As individuals, we deal with the crisis of choice constantly, each choice affecting the bigger picture of our lives. Sometimes we do not look for counsel or direction. But when we are really stuck, unsure, and feel trapped between two seemingly bad choices ("between a rock and a hard place"), we want direction, we want to be guided along the best path.

Even with our great desire for guidance often we seem unable to discover which way God would want us to go. Even when we think we know which way, we still feel a little unsure. Why is this? What is the problem? Is God unable to direct us? Are we unable to listen?

Mordecai was able to deal directly with Esther's problems by talking to her or sending her letters. He could answer the specifics of what she, in her individual life and experiences, should do. God does not seem to communicate with us in the same clear-cut fashion. Esther had clear concrete advice, and by hindsight we see that it worked. We do not have the benefit of hindsight until long after our decision has been made. For our guidance should we then depend on other humans as Esther depended on Mordecai?

The real question is: Can we know what God's instructions are for the specific choices we make in our lives? This is the central question. If indeed we can receive such guidance, then is the instruction to be rendered by human agents who know us, or by impersonal agents such as the Bible or a good religious book?

## REACT

Why does God leave so much decision making up to us? Is there only one possible "best" route for our lives?

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Proverbs 14:12

## Who Is This Guy?

by Mike Fulbright

### HOW TO

**Key text:**  
1 John 4:7, 8

Have you ever felt as if you have nothing to offer? Does it ever seem as if you're just another supporting actor with no big role to play? Do you ever feel as though you've never had the chance to bask in the limelight? In the second chapter of Esther we find a man who may have entertained these thoughts at one time or another. However, in the life of Mordecai we find three basic virtues of Christianity: love, concern, and unselfishness.

We encounter the first virtue in verse seven of chapter two. Mordecai has taken Esther into his own home to rear her because both her father and mother have died. Mordecai must have loved this young girl very much to go to the trouble of actually bringing her up in his own home. The Bible gives no evidence that would suggest that anyone asked him to do it. It was willful choice. The apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13:13, speaks of the greatest spiritual gift as being love. Upon encountering Mordecai we immediately find the virtue of love portrayed in his life.

We discover a second basic virtue of Christianity in verse eleven. "Every day he walked back and forth near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her" (2:11).<sup>\*</sup> Pictured here is Mordecai's concern for his adopted daughter. The Bible seems to show that Mordecai spent a lot of time watching out for Esther. It seems as though fathers are usually very protective of their "little" girls, and in this instance Mordecai is no exception to the rule. This brings me to a basic question. Do we show enough concern for one another in our Christianity? Mordecai offers a prime example of true Christian concern in this week's scriptural passage.

The third and final virtue we discover in Mordecai is unselfishness. Not once in our scriptural passage did he try to push his way into the limelight. Not once did he become jealous of his adopted daughter and complain that glory had eluded him. Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, says in chapter twelve verses five and six; "There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. . . ." Mordecai was completely satisfied with his role as a supporting actor and fulfilled this role to the best of his ability.

I'd like to challenge each of you as Christians to do two things:

- 1. Become more aware of the needs of those around you.** Strive to show more love and concern to those with whom you interact each day.
- 2. Be willing to fill the role of a supporting actor.** Don't be afraid to take a back seat. Encourage someone else on to higher achievements.

<sup>\*</sup> All scripture quotations taken from the New International Version.

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# The Causal Connection

by Scott McClure

## OPINION

Key text:  
Proverbs 14:12

When Pilate stood before the angry mob he was faced with a choice. He could either make a stand for Christ and incur the wrath of the people or he could compromise his convictions by committing Jesus to crucifixion, and in this way retain his standing with the people. By choosing the latter option, Pilate failed to follow the calling of God and would later pay the consequences. "Rather than risk losing his position, he delivered Jesus up to be crucified. But in spite of his precautions, the very thing he dreaded afterward came upon him."<sup>1</sup>

The plight of Pilate is an obvious illustration of the ageless "wages of sin" predicament; however, the story of Esther and Mordecai is a much less black-and-white situation. While Pilate's future was to be dominated by guilt, remorse, and a painful death, Esther and Mordecai used the Jews' disobedience to deliver them from the persecutions of Haman and Xerxes. While Pilate's mistake was fatal, God was able to use the error of the Jews in Esther's time to their own advantage. Over the period of their exile, the Lord had presented the Jews with numerous opportunities to return to their land and to re-accept His doctrine. Because of their continuing spiritual blindness, "those of the Jews who had failed of heeding the message to flee were called upon to face a terrible crisis."<sup>2</sup> While the second chapter of Esther relates the great successes and triumphs that this unknown Jewish girl achieved, the story, as we all know, goes on to tell how she called on the guidance of the Lord to be with her as she stood before the King so that she might save her people. Here the theme changes from one of disobedience to one of how God delivers those who depend on Him. It is easy to this point to lose the correlation with the earlier chapters and concentrate solely on the magnificent saving grace that Esther's faith brought her.

Our lives are dominated by situations in which God comes to the rescue of one of His children in some perilous situation. Too often we lose the causal connection with the failure to heed the instructions of God, a failure that led to the subsequent trouble. Even in the story of Esther I tend to get too caught up in the scenario of Esther's rise to queen and the way in which she delivered her people, and I ignore the reason why God was forced to use her in this way.

The real value in lessons of God's guidance is the realization of the spiritual blindness that led us to our trouble. Whether we will be doomed to death because of our error, like Pilate, or redeemed from sin, like Esther, will depend on our receptiveness to God's grace in our lives.

1. *The Desire of Ages*,  
p. 738.  
2. *Prophets and Kings*,  
p. 600.

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Lesson 10, November 29—December 5

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# A Score to Settle

"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (Galatians 6:7, NIV).



# Does Power Corrupt?

by Dean Kinsey

Does power corrupt? And does absolute power corrupt absolutely?

In the power-oriented society of King Ahasuerus' court, power politics was simply a game to be played, and Haman played it to the hilt.

He became a powerful member of the king's court by doing good things for him. As a result, Haman was promoted above even the princes of the kingdom.

But there was a Jew, Mordecai by name, a man who served both God and the king, who could not bring himself to do obeisance to Haman, regardless of the position he held.

Naturally Haman was insulted and infuriated. But the vengeance he plotted went far beyond simple revenge, it could well have been called Haman's holocaust. Was it his power that corrupted Haman? Is it possible for power, in and of itself, to produce either good or evil? Or is power simply a vehicle by which one accomplishes his or her goals—whether they be good or evil?

Perhaps we too often equate power with evil and as a result

have a fear of claiming and using power, almost as if power in itself is evil. Not so.

Power must be combined with specific ingredients in order to produce either good or evil. Because God's power is combined with His virtue, goodness exists. As Christians, we may also combine virtue with God's power, and have good results. "For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power" (2 Tim. 1:7, NASB).

What sort of experience triggers the good power, God's power? When the Jews of the kingdom became aware of the impending holocaust, they invoked a power they had known about all along. They also understood how to make that power work. It could not be done through pomp and egotistical display, but rather through a whole series of humbling experiences: fasting, weeping, lamenting, wearing sackcloth, and lying in ashes. And good eventually prevailed.

Does power corrupt? Power that is connected to evil does, but the power that is a vehicle for virtue can and will combat the world's evil.

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture:  
Esther 3

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# Esther and the End-Time Remnant

by Norman R. Gulley

**LOGOS** **Theme:** Sin has no reason for existence. But as soon as it came into being, it sought to destroy all that represented good. In the book of Esther we see one more powerful illustration of the conflict between good and evil. Although evil may seem for a while to triumph, God and good will eventually conquer.

## 1. What Is Sin? (read 1 John 3:4, Romans 14:23)

Our study of Haman begins with a look at Satan and the origin of sin. The Bible defines sin in two ways. "Sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4) and "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). The first speaks of a broken law and the second of a broken relationship.

Scripture says, "Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou has corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness" (Eze. 28:17). Lucifer is described as "full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. . . . Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee" (28:12-15).

Christ was the Creator of everything. The Bible states, "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth" (Col. 1:16, NIV). God "made the universe" through Christ (Heb. 1:2). Hence Christ created Lucifer. He may have been the first being Christ ever made. He was the leading angel, as covering cherub at God's right hand. He was the first prime minister in God's universe kingdom.

The original sin was pride. Satan's self-exaltation lifted him up beyond his reason. Infatuation with his own beauty and status set him loose from his wisdom. So he actually came to consider himself equal with God. "He gloried in his brightness and exaltation and aspired to be equal with God." "Why", questioned this mighty angel, 'should Christ have the supremacy? Why is He honored above Lucifer?'<sup>1</sup> He made "claims to equality with Christ."<sup>2</sup>

Here this created being boasts of equality with the One who made him! How blind is sin.

Yet he was not fully blind. For "Lucifer was convinced that he was in the wrong. He saw that 'the Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works' (Ps. 145:17). . . . He nearly reached the decision to return, but pride forbade him."<sup>3</sup> So ultimately pride cherished is wisdom lost—resulting in blindness.

## 2. How Does Haman Compare With Satan?

*"King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles" (Esther 3:1, NIV).*

Haman was chief next to the king, as Lucifer was chief next to Christ. Both Lucifer and Haman experienced the fact that power can corrupt.

*Is there such a thing as "sanctified ambition"? Should a Christian strive to be at the top in his or her career?*

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### 3. Does Scripture Hint at the Cause for Haman's Hatred of Mordecai and His People? (read Esther 3:2-6)

*"All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor. . . . When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes" (NIV).*

Obviously Haman enjoyed receiving homage, even expected every knee to bow in reverence and respect. But what was involved? Was it respect or worship? "The Persian edict sprang from the malice of Haman toward Mordecai. Not that Mordecai had done him harm, but he had refused to show him reverence which belongs only to God."<sup>4</sup> Mordecai stood while all others bowed low. This maddened Haman. He wanted to be worshiped. Notice his overkill response—gallows for Mordecai and death decree for all his fellow Jews. Whereas, later Jesus was one man dying instead of a nation (as perceived by Caiaphas), here was a nation to die because of one man. Did Haman really think himself that important? Truly he was as blind as Lucifer. Such is the result of sin.

### 4. What Other Old Testament Stories Parallel This Haman-Mordecai Encounter?

The brothers of Joseph bowed in respect to Pharaoh's prime minister. They did not know him to be Joseph. They supposed he was an Egyptian. Here Jews showed deference in bowing, something Mordecai would also gladly do. But in Haman's case false worship was involved. This he refused to give.

Three Hebrew workers refused to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's image on the plain of Dura. They stood tall while everyone else prostrated low. Again false worship was the issue.

The above two are insights into the great controversy. Joseph, a type of Christ, was a savior to famine-stricken nations, and in particular to Jacob's family—thus enabling the chosen people to survive. Satan schemed to destroy the ancestral line of Jesus (*Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 450), just as later, through Herod, he tried to kill the Saviour.

The three Hebrew worthies would not worship anyone or anything beside the true God. They are the type of the end-time remnant that will refuse to bow down to a Sunday law. "To secure popularity and patronage, legislators will yield to the demand for a Sunday law. . . . On this battlefield comes the last great conflict of the controversy between truth and error. And we are not left in doubt as to the issue. Now, as in the days of Mordecai, the Lord will vindicate His truth and His people."<sup>5</sup>

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## 5. In What Way Does the Book of Esther Contribute Insights to the End-Time Remnant?

Together with Daniel and Revelation, Esther is a special book for the end-time generation, for all three books speak of deliverance of God's people and destruction of their enemies. Thus deliverance came to the three in the fiery furnace and destruction to those who threw them in. Deliverance came to Daniel in the lions' den, destruction to those who put him there. These historic events point to the coming greatest time of trouble ever experienced, when Christ will stand up and deliver His people (Dan. 12:1). History will be repeated. Revelation speaks of this great time of trouble when the whole world will wonder after the beast (Rev. 13:3). A death decree follows the uniting of church and state. But God's people will sing the song of Moses and the Lamb—the song of deliverance.

God led His ancient people out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and all were delivered from the pursuing Egyptian army. Just as that mightiest military machine of the time perished—so God will deliver His people out of this world and destroy their enemies.

These past events give insight into the final pre-Advent period of the great controversy. The story of Esther provides one of these historical insights, for the 75-foot gallows erected by Haman for Mordecai became the very instrument for Haman's own death. With his enemy destroyed, Mordecai was delivered and exalted to leadership next to the king.

Even though there may be some question as to the motive for Haman's hatred of Mordecai, there is no question about King Xerxes' reason to elevate Mordecai.

*The persecution of God's people during the last days makes no more sense than Haman's lust for the total destruction of the Jews during the time of Esther. We say that evil hates good—but why should it? Why cannot evil just ignore good? Why should it go out of its way to destroy those who are good?*

## 6. Why Did King Xerxes Elevate Mordecai?

He had been faithful to the king, exposing an assassination plot. Queen Esther pleaded for him. So it will be for the end-time generation. They will, above all else, be true to God, and Christ intercedes for them. In the final Advent exodus, Christ will take men and women out of this world and make them priests and kings at His Father's throne. What an elevation! If Jesus "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross" (Heb. 12:2), we too can go through final events by keeping our gaze on Christ rather than the crisis—on the coming joy rather than on the passing test.

*When it seems that you are surrounded with evil influences and that evil is triumphing, what can you do to gain a clear understanding of the fact that good eventually will gain the victory? What can you do to help others also gain this insight?*

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 37.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
4. *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 450.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 451

# Faith or Vengeance?

by Carla F. Daniels

## TESTIMONY

Key text:

Romans 12:17-21

As Christians we have read extensively of the ongoing battle between God and the forces of evil led by Satan. Inevitably we ask the questions When and How—will it end? We are the weapons in this battle used by Satan in an attempt to weaken and sadden our Father. Yet we have no power to judge or influence the outcome. We have no power to get even for being used. This is a job for God and God alone. We must set our lives and goals to be weapons for God so this battle can come to an end.

We see time and time again through study that God has called us as a people to stand tall but not alone. This principle is evident in quotations like the following: "I am instructed to say to Seventh-day Adventists the world over, God has called us as a people to be a peculiar treasure unto Himself. . . . Nothing in this world is so dear to God as His church. With jealous care He guards those who seek Him. Nothing so offends God as for the servants of Satan to strive to rob His people of their rights. The Lord has not forsaken His people. Satan points to the mistakes that they have made, and tries to make them believe that thus they have separated themselves from God. Evil angels seek in every way to discourage those who are striving for victory over sin. They hold up before them their past unworthiness, and represent their case as hopeless. But we have an all-powerful Redeemer. Christ came from heaven in the guise of humanity to live the principles of righteousness in this world. 'We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.'"<sup>\*</sup>

The Lord is always there to take care of His people as is illustrated in the book of Esther. Our job is only to trust and be strong in our faith in God. The struggle between good and evil has existed for too long and is too strong a conflict for us to take into our own hands and stand alone. We must stand with God and allow him to take precedent and settle our conflicts. We, as humans, tend to allow this belief to get away from us day by day, but in Romans it clearly states, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom. 12:19).

Esther and Mordecai had the faith to believe that God would protect and deliver His people. Do we as Seventh-day Adventists possess this same undeniable and unquestioning trust?

## REACT

What examples of faith did Mordecai and Esther show, and how were they repaid for this faithfulness? How is the victory of good over evil illustrated, and what parallels and prophecies does this unfold for Seventh-day Adventists?

<sup>\*</sup> *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 397.

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# They Apply to Us Today

by Terrie McCarty

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Matthew 7:3

Student 1: Haman was really dumb! The king promoted him to second-in-command, and it all went to his head. There was a law about bowing to someone in power, and just because one guy wouldn't bow to him he was furious. Haman had floods of loyal subjects, but he let this one guy bother him. It was a silly rule anyway. Don't you agree?

Student 2: Sure. . . yeah. . . that reminds me of your experience student teaching yesterday.

Student 1: It was terrible! All the children drew cute little pictures except one kid. He drew a green sky and orange grass. All the colors were wrong! I'm sure he did it just to aggravate me. I told him the sky is always blue and grass is green. That's the rule! He said the rule was silly and refused to change. Can you imagine? I'd rather not talk about it anymore. Getting back to this Haman story, why did he let such a little thing bother him? Haman had thousands bowing to him, minus one. Why was one so important to him? Are you listening to me?

Student 2: Yes, I'm listening. Hey, what'd you think about the teacher keeping our class five minutes late in. . .

Student 1: That was so stupid! He can't keep us late. That class is exactly 50 minutes long, and some people have classes the next period. I was gonna walk out and I would have if the guys around me had.

Student 2: Did you have a class after that?

Student 1: No, but. . .

Student 2: Did he make you late for something?

Student 1: No. . . well, never mind. It wasn't that *important*, I suppose. Where was I? Oh, yeah, Haman learned of Mordecai's rebellion and pressured King Ahasuerus to sign a law to kill Mordecai. But he didn't stop with Mordecai. He wanted the whole nation of Israel slaughtered. He was obsessed and blinded by self and power. How could people in Bible times let themselves be so influenced by others?

Student 2: The same way your friends influenced your decision to stay in class.

Student 1: What are you trying to say? You're starting to annoy me just as my roommate does with all his accusations. I don't care to room with him anymore. I don't even want to talk to him again. I'm the student association president. Don't I deserve respect?

Student 2: Obsessed and blinded. . .

Student 1: What are you mumbling about? Are these Bible stories too outdated for you to relate to?

Student 2: On the contrary. I believe they apply to us today more than *you* know.

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# The Perils of Leadership

by Mark A. Bond

Have you ever been in a position of leadership and found that there was someone under you with whom you just couldn't get along? I was the captain of a floor-hockey team for my physical-education class when I was in the eighth grade. There was a guy on my team who was a pain in the neck. I had done everything within my power to please him and to be fair, but no matter how hard I tried, there was always something wrong with what I was doing. I'll admit that he was a better player than I was, and he knew a bit more than I did about the game. But, when I would ask for his advice he would chide me something like: "You're the captain, *you* should know what to do!" or "I hate being on a team without a *real* leader."

I was faced with a sticky problem. I didn't relish the thought of spending the entire season with someone on my team who would be a bigger challenge than the teams against whom we were going to be playing.

One of my fellow teammates told me that I should try to kick him off the team, or try to stand up to him and "show him what I was made of." This was a tempting offer. He *was* infringing upon my role as the team captain. However, I wouldn't be accomplishing anything by sowing seeds of hatred. Perhaps I could make peace with him and somehow win his loyalty while cultivating a better team and a friendship at the same time.

Realistically, he could be more of an asset to the team than I could be. His skill and coordination were finely tuned. This was the main reason I had chosen him for my team in the first place. Second, he too had leadership capabilities. Could I not put these positive characteristics to work, thus benefiting myself and the team as a whole?

I casually took him aside between classes and told him that I was really uneasy about our team and its chances at being successful. I sincerely asked for his help and suggested that he be in charge of creating plays for the team and putting them to work on the hockey floor. He took on the challenge with gusto, and though our team didn't finish first, we all worked well together and were one of the better teams in our class. I learned the following lessons from this experience:

**1. Think BEFORE you react.** Given the time to reflect upon the situation, you will begin to see alternatives that were not visible at first.

**2. Pray for guidance.** Read Luke 6:27-29. What does Christ say for us to do to those who are against us?

With God's help we can have control when we are faced with problems. We need not fall into the trap of hatred and scheming as Haman did.

## REACT

When Haman felt that his authority was in question, he lashed out against the guilty party, but his vengeance was turned around in the end. How does this apply to our daily problems? In what ways can we profit from Haman's mistake?

## HOW TO

Key text:  
Galatians 6:7,  
NASB

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# The Big Three

by Ken Rogers

## OPINION

Key text:  
Galatians 6:7

By outward appearances, he had achieved success. He held "position," for his seat was above all the other princes. He had "power." People bowed down to him, and he influenced governmental affairs. He also possessed "wealth." He was able to pay large sums of silver into the king's treasuries. But outward appearances aside, Haman was inwardly a man "filled with fury" (Esther 3:5, RSV).

The big three, "position, power, and wealth," have the ability to corrupt people. Cravings for position may elevate our egos but debase our spirit. The abuse of power to manipulate others in order to build oneself up is destructive. And an abundance of wealth can mask our need for dependence upon God, and snare us in the self-sufficiency trap.

We do not know all the reasons why Haman hated Mordecai, nor why Haman wished to eradicate God's people. Perhaps Haman's "will to power" was so consuming that Mordecai's failure to bow down and submit simply caused Haman to crave absolute power. "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."<sup>1</sup> But whatever Haman's motivations were, we would still have a difficult time making any sense of them. Sinful actions cannot always be fully understood or explained. We can, however, see the results of the deceitful edict that Haman procured from the king. For, while life went on as usual for the king and Haman, the people of God were perplexed, and there was great mourning throughout the land where the edict went.

The big three can be forces for wrongdoing, but they also have great potential for good. "If we wish to be governed by God's will we can learn to use our wealth, power, and prestige for others and to extend the kingdom of God in the world."<sup>2</sup> It is refreshing in today's world to see people who are using their successes in obedience to God's will and to the advancement of His cause.

In this struggle between Haman and Mordecai we witness the classic ongoing battle between good and evil. "The trying experiences that came to God's people in the days of Esther were not peculiar to that age alone. . . . The same spirit that in ages past led men to persecute the true church, will in the future lead to the pursuance of a similar course toward those who maintain their loyalty to God. . . . Men of position and reputation will join with the lawless and the vile to take counsel against the people of God. Wealth, genius, education, will combine to cover them with contempt."<sup>3</sup>

But let us not fear, for we are not left in doubt as to what the outcome of these persecutions will be. "Today, as in the days of Esther and Mordecai, the Lord will vindicate His truth and His people."<sup>4</sup>

## REACT

How am I using my position, power, and wealth to extend the kingdom of God in this world?

1. Lord Acton John Emerich Dalberg, 1887.

2. Anthony Campolo, Jr., "The Success Fantasy" (Victor Books, SP Publications, 1980), pp. 17, 18.

3. *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 605, 606.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 606.

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**Ken Rogers is youth pastor of Collegedale Seventh-day Adventist Church, Collegedale, Tennessee.**



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Lesson 11, December 6-12

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# Impending Holocaust

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28, NIV).





# Inch by Inch

by A. Allan Martin

**INTRO-  
DUCTION**  
Scripture:  
Esther 4 and  
Romans 8:28

"Inch by inch, Allan.

Twelve of them make a foot.  
Three of those make a yard.  
Pretty soon you'll have a foot-  
ball field. Inch by inch, Allan,  
inch by inch."

The first part of the climb  
was no problem. I knew the  
passage up the mountain, and  
the upward grade was enjoy-  
ably bearable. But now the in-  
cline walk had turned into a  
90-degree vertical wall of  
rock, with pebbles for footholds.  
Each inch was a victory as  
both muscle and mind strug-  
gled, stretched, and strained.  
I was going to conquer the  
climb. Never had I hungered  
for triumph like this. Sweat  
mixed with dirt smeared  
across my brow as I hugged the  
rock face and reached for my  
next hand hold.

I again said to myself. "Inch  
by inch, Allan, inch by inch."

As I neared the summit I  
neglected to double check a  
narrow ledge I intended to use  
as a foothold. In a moment of  
clumsy excitement, the foot-  
hold gave way, bouncing the  
weight of my entire body on  
my left arm. My left hand held  
on to a short stump handhold  
even though the weight of my  
body had pulled my shoulder  
out of place. I frantically  
scrambled for another foothold  
—any foothold. A sharp throbbing  
sting numbed my dis-  
jointed arm as I stabilized my  
position with two new footholds.  
My left arm was now useless.

"Inch by inch."

Torture is a *kind* word to  
describe the method by which I  
clawed the rest of my way up.  
Three limbs. No picks, no  
gloves, nothing. Strapping my  
left arm close to my body, I con-  
tinued my ascent with every  
drop of determination I owned.

"Inch by inch, Allan. Pretty  
soon you'll have a football  
field."

I reached up once more and  
touched the summit, the final  
plateau. As I lifted the rest of  
my torn, bruised, and tired  
body up onto the top of the  
mountain, the warmth of satis-  
faction shot through my body.  
Ecstatic, I yelled and screamed.

"This rock is mine! I did it!  
Inch by inch, Allan, inch by  
inch. I did it! I won!"

Then a voice came from be-  
hind, "No. *We've* won."

As I turned around to see  
who had spoken, a safety har-  
ness, securely wrapped  
around my waist and trunk,  
tugged at me. From the har-  
ness dangled a strong, sturdy,  
life-line rope.

I looked up and saw Christ.  
He was standing firmly on the  
summit. His feet were stead-  
fast in place and positioned as  
if to brace Himself, brace Him  
as though He was pulling in a  
tug-of-war. Wrapped around  
His hands was a life-line rope,  
*my* life-line rope. It had torn,  
cut, and burned His hands raw  
in the struggle to lift me. His  
blood stained His fingers.

"Inch by inch, Lord, we've  
won. We've won."

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Source at Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, College-  
dale, Tennessee.

# The Unlikeliest Heroine

by Jerry A. Gladson

**LOGOS** **Theme:** God's hand is over human affairs. No situation exists but what He can turn it into a learning, character-building experience if we will let Him do so. Ultimately He will deliver His people.

## 1. Mordecai's Mourning and Esther's Response (read Esther 4:1-5)

*"And in each and every province where the command and decree of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay on sackcloth and ashes" (Esther 4:3, NASB).*

Mordecai's position at the court quickly gave him access to the plot against the Jews, originated by Haman (3:12-15). His response and that of his people accord with traditional Oriental expression of grief: he "rent his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, . . . wailing with a loud and bitter cry" (4:1, 3, RSV; see Gen. 37:34; 44:13). This behavior renders him ritually unclean and unable to enter the king's gate (Esther 4:2). Mordecai seems unaware that he, by provoking the hostility of Haman, has triggered the whole threat. Esther learns of Mordecai's grief but, when she sends fresh clothing to replace the sackcloth, finds him inconsolable (4:4).

*At what points in a Christian life is it permissible to give vent to deeply felt emotions?*

## 2. Mordecai's Explanation and Esther's Fear (read Esther 4:6-12)

*"All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king to the inner court who is not summoned, he has but one law, that he be put to death" (Esther 4:11, NASB).*

Hathach, Esther's servant, returns from Mordecai bearing a copy of the written law, with instructions from Mordecai that she try to intervene with Xerxes "on behalf of her people" (4:8, literal translation). Esther's return message reveals the virtually absolute respect ancient monarchs demanded: No one goes into the inner court of the king without his permission. Violators are summarily put to death (verses 10, 11). Although this interdiction was a security measure, the case of Vashti, the favored queen whom Esther replaced, shows that Xerxes was not above sacrificing someone near to him when they crossed his will. Esther has reason for her fearful restraint. What can she do? Xerxes hasn't summoned her for at least a month (verse 11)!

*This situation demanded political action in the form of "lobbying." When should Christians seek to influence the actions of state? Should they attempt to intervene for self-interests?*

## 3. Mordecai's Rebuttal and Esther's Acquiescence (read Esther 4:13-17)

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"If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14, NASB).

Mordecai reminds Esther her own life is in danger. Despite her failure to reveal her true national identity when she came to the palace (2:10), she will be found out and executed along with the rest of the Jews (4:13). At this juncture, Mordecai utters what has probably become the most famous line of the book: "Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (verse 14, RSV). The expression "if you keep silence" is emphatic in Hebrew, stressing the urgency of necessary action, an action only Esther can provide. She remains the only hope of her people, although Mordecai refers to "deliverance" from another quarter.

One of the strange and as yet unexplained facets of the book of Esther is its conspicuous lack of any mention of the name of God, religion, faith, prayer, or worship. In this sense the book appears "secular" by modern standards. Some think verse 14, with its reference to "deliverance . . . from another quarter," represents an oblique allusion to God. The post-exilic era in Israel's history, the period in which Esther was written, found the Jews searching for more and more indirect ways of referring to God. Terms like "Most High," "the Name," et cetera, came into use as reverential ways of speaking of God. Gradually, a reluctance to pronounce audibly the divine name, *Yahweh*, led to the actual loss of knowledge of how it was to be pronounced. *Yahweh* represents a scholarly reconstruction of this name, based on the best evidence available to us. It is entirely possible that Esther, given the exilic setting of the story, represents an extreme case of avoidance, not only of the divine name but of any explicit sentiment that might be construed in this direction. Robert Gordis recently explained the situation of Esther by suggesting the author deliberately chose to write in the form of a Persian court chronicle, and thus ostensibly as a Persian or non-Jew, so that he might gain credibility with Jews who had returned to the homeland for the events in the book and for the festival of Purim it introduces (see Esther 9:27, 28). Esther, we might say, seeks to talk about God (indirectly) without talking about God (directly).

The book of Esther, in some manner, lies back of the Jewish festival of Purim, celebrated in February or March each year. Its record of an attempted pogrom has become a tragic prototype of numerous such attempts to destroy Jewish existence ever since. "The book may be described as typological," notes Gordis, "because it is concerned with a phenomenon destined to remain a constant in Jewish experience for millennia."<sup>2</sup> We Adventists frequently understand it in the same light. We have transposed it into a Christian eschatological setting and seen it as an example of what will happen to God's people near the end of time (see *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 605-606).

1. "Religion, Wisdom and History in the Book of Esther—A New Solution to an Ancient Crux," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100/3 (1981), p. 375.  
2. *Ibid.*, p. 388.

# Impending Holocaust

by Joe Rivera

## TESTIMONY

Key text:

1 Peter 1:6, 7

Ellen White provides many insights on the building of character through trials we encounter. As God is allowed to be in control over human affairs He will ultimately deliver His people. The following quotations focus on God's using our trials to produce victory.

"God does not prevent the plotting of wicked men, but He causes their devices to work for good to those who in trial and conflict maintain their faith and loyalty."<sup>1</sup>

"The Lord can bring victory out of that which may seem to us discomfiture and defeat."<sup>2</sup>

"So long as we are in the world, we shall meet with adverse influences. There will be provocations to test the temper; and it is by meeting these in a right spirit that the Christian graces are developed. If Christ dwells in us, we shall be patient, kind, and forbearing, cheerful amid frets and irritations. Day by day and year by year we shall conquer self, and grow into a noble heroism."<sup>3</sup>

"All our suffering and sorrows, all our temptations and trials, all our sadness and grief, all our persecutions and privations, in short, all things work together for our good. All experiences and circumstances are God's workmen whereby good is brought to us."<sup>4</sup>

"Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:17, 18).

"All that has perplexed us in the providence of God will in the world to come be made plain. The things hard to be understood will find explanation. The mysteries of grace will unfold before us. Where our finite minds discovered only confusion and broken promises, we shall see the most perfect and beautiful harmony. We shall know that infinite love ordered the experiences that seemed most trying. As we realize the tender care of Him who makes all things work together for our good, we shall rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."<sup>5</sup>

## REACT

1. How can my faith be strengthened to believe that God is just as able to save today as He was in the time of Jacob, Esther, Daniel, and Paul?
2. Why does God often allow so much time to pass and so much anguish to be suffered before He intervenes?

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 574.  
2. *Ibid.*, p. 481.  
3. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 487.  
4. *Ibid.*, p. 489.  
5. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 286.

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Joe Rivera is a junior theology and behavioral-science major at Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Collegedale, Tennessee.



# When God Is Silent

by Wilma Zalabak

What do you do in a crisis when God is silent?

Some people stew and fret and worry.

"The money just didn't stretch this month. How will we make it?"

"I'm so afraid of persecution. I know I'll give in under torture."

They forget that God, even a silent God, has a thousand miracles waiting in the wings (see *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 481). They forget that God's choices for us are exactly what ours would be if we could know all the implications (see *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 224, 225). They act as if God doesn't care.

What do you do in a crisis when God is silent?

Some people embrace their "fate," and sit back to watch their destiny.

"With as little education as I've got, jobs just don't come my way, you know. The kids eat on food stamps."

"Why try to protect religious freedom? Persecution will come anyway. Let it come."

They forget that opportunities come from God, but success comes from the way we use opportunities (see *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 321). They act as if God simply manipulates irreversible fates.

What do you do in a crisis when God is silent?

In the book of Esther, God is silent. Perhaps Esther begins to fret and worry, to act as if God doesn't care. Or perhaps she thinks to sit back and watch destiny happen (see Esther 4:10-13), as if God manipulates irreversible fates. On Mordecai's encouragement, however, Esther takes a different course. She shows us what to do in a crisis when God is silent.

First she recognizes past providence (verse 14). She has "the quiet witness borne by her life during the past four years"\* to influence the king in her favor, and she has the direction of God's leading in the past by which to line up future choices.

Next she organizes a prayer group—or rather, many prayer groups (verse 16). She knows that prayer is more effective when two or more agree and pray together (Matt. 18:19, 20). She will not proceed without a thorough dependence on God, giving Him permission to speed or thwart any plan she might make, according to His providence.

Finally, Esther does what seems best to her at the time (verse 16). She acts; she risks. She doesn't wait for providence; providence has already come.

What do you do in a crisis when God is silent? Rather than choosing useless worry or careless inaction, Esther acts! She recognizes past providence, organizes a prayer group, and then does what seems best to her at the time.

## REACT

For the 6-year-old who is afraid the house will burn down while she's sleeping, is this an adequate answer: "If for some reason God saw that it was best for your future, would you really want it any other way?"

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Esther 4:14, 16

\* SDA Bible  
Commentary, vol. 3,  
p. 477.

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# How to Handle Troubles, Tragedy or Trauma

by James Herman, Jr.

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**1 Thessalonians**  
**5:18**

"Do it yourself" articles tend to be too simplistic and sometimes not quite real. So for today, how about an illustration and very general insights. Analyzing the following story will help settle the issues of troubles, tragedy, or trauma on the principle of God's abiding love.

Buddy was nearly to the end of his first semester of college. As far as he was concerned things were great! College provided a little more personal freedom, he was popular, tall and good-looking, classes were relatively easy, and this hectic schedule gave him little time for his conscience to bother him. Spirituality was not on his list of priorities.

The night before Christmas break (in those days semester end was in January) a festive mood pervaded the dorm. Rooms were crowded as bull sessions progressed after dorm curfew. Buddy and his friends were no exceptions. Someone was displaying their latest toy—a contraband item—a small-caliber pistol. Finally lights were turned out, and things broke up.

The next morning Buddy finished packing, skipped Bible class, and was heading out of the dorm with his luggage, ready for a fun-filled Christmas break. As he started down the stairway a greeting was called out by a friend. Buddy stopped and returned the greeting. He noticed that his friend was playing with that same gun he had seen the night before. Turning to go, his friend raised and pointed the "unloaded" pistol at Buddy. He called out, "Got ya"—BANG! Suddenly Buddy felt a rush of heat on the back of his neck as he tumbled down the steps.

Life was never the same from that point on—but at least there was life. Legs no longer worked, arms and hands responded much differently from the way they had before. He learned new words such as *paraplegic*, *wheelchairs*, *chucks*, and *P-bags*. He also learned who Jesus really is—new names for Him also such as my Friend, my Comfort and my Strength.

I came to know Buddy after he was shot, when I helped dress and push him to class. Never once did I ever hear him complain about his condition. On the contrary, he was always positive, happy, and smiling. He says that "it was the only way the Lord could get my attention. In heaven Jesus will make it up to me."

Buddy believes that all things do work together for good (Rom. 8:28). And Christ's promise, "I am going to come again so that you can be with Me" (see John 14:1-3) helps him to hang in there (see 1 Tim. 6:20).

## REACT

While many unfortunate events result from mistaken human decisions and actions, God is capable of making every mistake, every failure, every lapse of good judgment, a learning experience for us. We can look back and see how our characters have been strengthened as a result. Like Buddy would you be willing to share one such personal experience with your Sabbath School class?

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James Herman, Jr., is chaplain at Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Collegedale, Tennessee.

# “Who’s in Control Here?”

by Laura H. Gladson

## OPINION

Key text:  
Romans 8:28

Mordecai and his fellow Jews responded to this ethnic threat with mourning, but he went beyond the usual ritualistic grief—he presented the situation to Esther. He evidently felt that she had the greatest chance of anyone of doing something concrete about this potential pogrom. In later centuries the Jews presented a passive stance to the sharpened knives of various powers, but Mordecai was ultimately a man of action.

At first Esther responded, “What can I do about it?” But she did not simply wring her hands. She planned a course of action that showed that she had made good use of her time at court. She was aware of plot and counterplot, of strategy and intrigue, of politics and cunning. Some may flinch at the bold intrigue Esther carried out, while others point to the fact that her intervention literally made the difference between life and death for her and her people.

Who is in control anyway? Does the Christian take literally the idea of letting God lead in every decision, every step, all aspects of one’s life? Does God really control and intervene in one’s life? In my work as a family counselor I hear people say, “I can’t make a decision about what career to choose. I want the Lord to make it clear to me what He wants me to do.” How far can one take this idea of God’s spelling out each step?

One student revealed to me her pregnancy. When I asked whether she and her boyfriend had taken precautions, she said, “Oh, no. I felt that if it was the Lord’s will that I get pregnant, that was a sign that this guy was the one I was to marry.” The boyfriend did not agree, and soon found himself another girlfriend, leaving her with the burden of deciding what to do.

We can shape our lives around the philosophy that nothing happens to us but what the Lord allows to happen. Yet I see a flaw in such a stance. Who is in control? If what I do does not affect what happens to me, what is there left for me to do? The result of my own misjudgments, wrong decisions, or willful actions are my responsibility, not something the Lord chose to let me experience, however much it might be for my own good.

When a friend’s mother was killed in a car accident, the family members each went through their own hell of trying to figure out why such a tragedy had happened. Yet the bare facts were that two very drunk teen-age boys decided to race her car.

I see God as in control, but not controlling. While He may miraculously intervene at times, this happens very seldom. The vast majority of the time we have to take our own action, make our own decisions (granted, within His guidelines), control our own lives. Esther did not passively fold her hands, but took action, and her actions had far-reaching results for her people.

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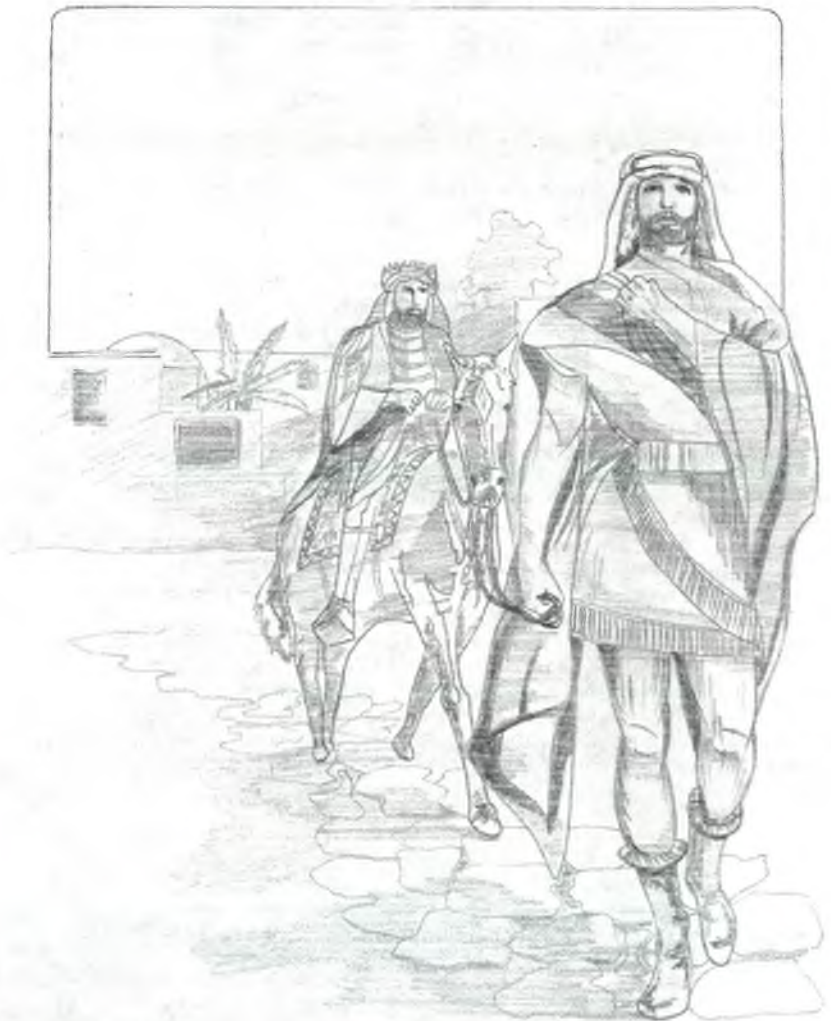
Laura H. Gladson is a counselor and adjunct professor of psychology at the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Lesson 12, December 13-19

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# Sweet Dreams Turn Sour

“ ‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the Lord” (Isaiah 55:8, NIV).





# The Battle of Bull Run

by Janelle Burton

Through the hot summer air the shouts of the Union army could be heard. "On to Richmond!" they cried as they marched south.

Spirits were high everywhere in the North, and for good reason. "Victory is inevitable" was the word from the Government. "God is on our side" was the word from the people.

Enthusiasm was so high that on July 21, 1861, 30,000 Union troops, unprepared for battle, met an equal force of unprepared Confederates at Bull Run, 20 miles south of the Northern capitol, Washington. From the beginning the Northern troops, under McDowell, swept back the Confederates. A Blue victory seemed sure.

It was then that "Stonewall" Jackson and a Virginia brigade arrived from the Shenandoah Valley. Jackson's troops held onto a key hill, and the Union advance was stopped.

Then the combined Confederate forces launched a counterattack and drove the North back. The Union retreat quickly turned to panic as those who had been so sure of victory abandoned weapons and supplies. Sightseers from Washington who had come to lunch and watch a quick and easy victory, were trampled in the flight from the Confederate forces.

The Confederates—too

inexperienced to follow up the attack and not realizing that they had won the battle—began to flee themselves. Because of all the confusion, casualties were low on both sides, but in the end the "sure-thing" Northern victory went to the South.

Everyone can relate to the North's sense of defeat. We meet disappointment daily. We try and plan our lives down to the last detail. We say, "After college I'll marry So-and-so," or "I'll go to Harvard Medical School," only to discover that So-and-so drops you cold after graduation and you haven't been accepted at any medical school, let alone Harvard.

So you ask yourself, Why, and then ask God, Why? "Why won't You let me do it my way?" Sooner or later we find out God's way is better. When the Union troops were defeated they were discouraged. But their casualties were low and the battle helped them realize that defeating the South was going to be an immense task.

Because of the South's victory at Bull Run, Union troops were better prepared to fight and win future battles, which eventually turned the tide of war in favor of the North. Similar themes are discernable in this week's lesson. Because of Esther and Mordecai, Haman's sweet dreams turn sour.

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture:  
Esther 5-7

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Janelle Burton is a sophomore communication major at Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Collegedale, Tennessee.

# Sweet Dreams Turn Sour

by Ron Springett

**LOGOS** Theme: Although God never deserts us when we face difficulty, we often cannot understand why He does things as He does. As did the book of Ruth, the book of Esther reveals that God sometimes works out His will in indirect ways.

## 1. Esther Invites the King and Haman to a Banquet (read Esther 5:1-8).

*"If it please the king, let the king and Haman come this day to a dinner that I have prepared for the king"* (Esther 5:4, RSV).

The book of Esther grabs our attention because in such a short space it deals with large issues in which we all have an interest. Here we find love and hate, life and death, faith and fear, grace and greed, all presented against a backdrop of high-stakes political intrigue. We are also gripped by the story because (without casting any doubt on the historicity of the narrative) we recognize that the author is a consummate storyteller. Whatever facts were at his or her disposal, the story has been developed in a masterful way to heighten the suspense and to make the characters stand out in bold relief. The issues are clear, everything is black or white, there are no gray areas. The key individuals in the plot act out their parts as if they were illustrating the proverbial adages of the Wisdom Literature concerning the wise and the foolish; e.g., "An evil man is ensnared in his transgression, but a righteous man sings and rejoices" (Prov. 29:6, RSV).

So, in this week's section we find Haman a man greedy, ambitious, vain, proud, and "petty?". He seeks to destroy the one man who does not cater to his vanity (nothing is said about Mordecai's intentions). In his blind hate and lust for power Haman determines to wipe out the entire Jewish population in Persia; clearly a rash overreaction in which Haman sees no risk to himself, but a definite chance of financial gain. In the scale opposite this is placed the courage, grace, and faith of the orphaned Esther. She is willing to take a calculated personal risk in behalf of her people by approaching the king without his permission. She is accepted by the king despite the unauthorized appearance. "The fear of man lays a snare, but he who trusts in the Lord is safe" (Prov. 29:25, RSV).

Again, Haman conceives a plan and executes it immediately without much thought. He audaciously casts lots for the proposed day of destruction for a people; a paradigm of rash arrogance. Mordecai and Esther, on the other hand, wait for the right moment and the opportune time for making their request. The contrast is clear. "A man of quick temper acts foolishly, but a man of discretion is patient" (Prov. 14:17, RSV). Thus Esther waits, not willing to reveal her heart at the first banquet. Even at the second one she waits till the meal is over and Haman least suspects any disaster. She does not press her case, but waits for the king to ask what she wants. All Haman knows at this point is that he is invited to another dinner with the king and queen. "A prudent man conceals his knowledge, but fools proclaim their folly" (Prov. 12:23, RSV).

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*There is no mention of God or prayer in this book. There is no prayer for guidance or deliverance. No examples of faith and deliverance are cited from the Old Testament; there is no plea for God's mercy. The underlying assumption throughout is that God does will the deliverance of the Jews. Yet His will is determined and executed in a completely secular setting. How would you explain this?*

## **2. Haman Plans to Kill Mordecai (read Esther 5:9-14)**

*"And Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart" (Esther 5:9, RSV).*

Haman is overjoyed at this second invitation to dinner. He is elevated in rank and privilege, but not really a great man. Despite his recent "honors," he still fumes at Mordecai's resistance and plans a peculiar personal vengeance against him at the instigation of his family and friends. They knew him well, for the whole idea appeals to Haman's vanity and thirst for revenge. These seem to be the overriding passions of his life. Like a Nero or a Caligula he takes a special delight in giving the already defenseless Mordecai a spectacular send off. However, in planning the death of Mordecai in this fashion Haman is becoming entangled in his own web. As C.A. Moore notes, "If Providence sealed Haman's fate Haman himself certainly gave it a helping hand."<sup>1</sup> Of course there is no statement in the book that what happened was the work of God. We are left to assume that it was. On the surface it seems to be nothing but a series of coincidences that the king was sleepless that night, that he adapted this particular method of alleviating his discomfort, that a certain section of the chronicles concerning Mordecai was read to him, that Haman arrived early at the palace that morning, that he was the first to be questioned by the king.<sup>2</sup> True, Mordecai's question to Esther "Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" implies an unflinching trust in the overruling hand.<sup>3</sup> But this is quite different, in this book at least, from the idea of the intervening hand. The Talmud, Targum, and some versions supply the latter. The Targum points out that it was God who took away sleep from the king. The Latin version embellishes the text too, "And the God of the Jews and the Lord of all creation guided the hand of the reader to the book which the king had written to remind him of Mordecai." The intrusion of the divine element is quite crass in some texts, "And as the king was returning from the palace garden to the place where they were drinking wine, (Talmud and Targum add: behold the angel Gabriel gave the wicked Haman a push in sight of the king upon the couch on which Esther was reclining); and the king said etc."

*Proverbs 11:6 says, "The righteousness of the upright delivers them, but the treacherous are taken captive by their lust" (RSV). Is this a principle of life that always turns out this way without fail, or does God have to intervene to make it turn out this way?*

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### 3. Haman Forced to Honor Mordecai (read Esther 6:14)

*"Haman hurried to his house, mourning and with his head covered" (Esther 6:12, RSV).*

This section indicates a clear foreshadowing of Haman's ultimate doom as his family and friends were quick to recognize. Even Haman senses a serious situation here and calls in the wise men. Haman's pride, vanity, and egotism are shown to be the reasons for his downfall. Whom else could the king wish to honor except Haman the magnificent? Here we catch the first glimpse of the poetic justice that is being worked out in the story. What Haman wishes for himself Mordecai receives; what he wishes for Mordecai. . . ? The author doesn't tell us yet; we are kept in suspense. But the mourning and the covering of the head are dark premonitions; their significance is strengthened by the prophecy of his inevitable fall by his own wise men. "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18, RSV).

*Looking at the circumstances and Haman's actions and reactions this far, is his fall now a foregone conclusion; simply a matter of time? If not, how could Haman redeem himself?*

### 4. The Plot Uncovered; Haman Executed (read Esther 7:1-10)

*"So they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai" (Esther 7:10, RSV).*

By clever, patient stratagem Esther unmasks Haman as the culprit involved in a death threat against the queen. She also suggests that apart from the proposed annihilation of the Jews, the entire plan is not in the interests of the king or the kingdom. The thought seems to be that the ten thousand talents that Haman promised the king for the destruction of the Jews was a paltry sum compared to what Haman would reap from the confiscation of Jewish property and wealth. The king, realizing that he had been duped in more ways than one, was furious. He walks into the palace garden to make a crucial decision. Meanwhile, Haman, beside himself with terror at the king's displeasure, throws himself at the queen's feet to beg for his life. The king, returning from the garden and already biased in favor of Esther, finds in this act the excuse he is looking for. By convincing himself that Haman was trying to force the queen right there in the palace (i.e., sexually, a highly unlikely occurrence under the circumstances) he effectively condemns Haman to death. A servant mentions the gallows that Haman had built for Mordecai, and the king commands, "Hang him on that."

Poetic justice is done. Haman is hanged on his own gallows. The sentiment is found throughout Scripture—"He who digs a pit will fall into it, and a stone will come back upon him who starts it rolling" (Prov. 26:27, RSV).

1. C. A. Moore, *Esther, introduction, translation, and notes, The Anchor Bible*, vol. 7, eds. W.F. Albright and D.N. Freedman (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company Inc., 1971), p. 67.  
2. A.W. Streane, *The Book of Esther with Introduction and Notes, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, vol. 14, ed. A.F. Kirkpatrick (Cambridge: University Press, 1922), p. 34.  
3. *Ibid.*, p. 17.



# God Leads His Own

by Lynford Morton

When Esther prayed for the salvation of her people she had no idea how the Lord would use her to their benefit. She approached King Ahasuerus, trusting that the Lord would lead. Her chances of success were admittedly slim, but Esther, bold in her faith, declared, "So will I go in unto the King, . . . and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16). The Lord can lead in our lives only if we follow Him regardless of how bleak things may look.

"The imagination pictures impending ruin before and bondage or death behind. Yet the voice of God speaks clearly, 'Go forward.' We should obey this command, even though our eyes cannot penetrate the darkness, and we feel the cold waves about our feet. The obstacles that hinder our progress will never disappear before a halting, doubting spirit."<sup>1</sup>

"God has provided divine assistance for all the emergencies to which our human resources are unequal. He gives the Holy Spirit to help in every strait, to strengthen our hope and assurance, to illuminate our minds and purify our hearts. He provides opportunities and opens channels of working. If His people are watching the indications of His providence, and are ready to co-operate with Him, they will see mighty results."<sup>2</sup>

Esther was victorious in her attempt to see the king, but that was only a small sample of the Lord's leading in her life. Once He granted her wish to dine with the king, the Lord led her in a cunning move to postpone the request she had for the king.

"Esther gained much by delaying another day to state her request. Most of all, perhaps, Ahasuerus would doubtless be impressed that her appeal was not only a life-and-death matter to her personally—implied by her sudden appearance before him earlier that day—but that it was a deliberate, considerate appeal and not a momentary impulse. Furthermore, delay would heighten the king's curiosity and thus prepare him the more thoroughly for what would, under any circumstances, come as a great shock. And for Esther, the delay would mean time in which to pray and weigh carefully how she should present her appeal, time to seek composure before she should voice it. Though Esther knew it not as yet, Providence ordained the delay, the better to prepare the mind of the king (ch. 6:1-11)."<sup>3</sup>

Now with the king fully prepared, Esther could claim another victory for God and ensure the safety of her people. None of this would have been possible had she hesitated in executing any of God's commands.

## REACT

How often do we hesitate when God is trying to lead in our lives?

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Romans 8:28

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 290.  
2. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 660.  
3. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 479.

Lynford Morton is a communication major at Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Collegedale, Tennessee.

# It's No Different Now

by Paul Ware

## EVIDENCE

**Key texts:**  
**Esther 6:13;**  
**7:5-10;**  
**Psalm 23**

The year—480 B.C. The Persian King Xerxes sits on a throne on a high point overlooking the Bay of Salamis. He has destroyed the city of Athens and now hopes his fleet will crush the Greek fleet, thereby extending his empire and preventing further Greek revolts in Asia Minor. As Xerxes watches, the Greeks overwhelm his larger fleet. Seeing the futility of any further immediate action, Xerxes leaves his army under the generalship of Mardonius and returns to the Persian capital of Susa, not knowing that his forces would suffer further defeats by the Greeks the following year. These defeats would leave Persia a declining empire and would catapult Greece into its Golden Age. Nevertheless, the Persian Empire will continue its world dominance for the next 150 years.

On his return home, Xerxes' attentions turn toward more domestic matters. Xerxes is interested in finding a new queen to replace the queen he had banished in 483 B.C. In 479 B.C. he had discovered a young woman named Esther—the Esther of the Bible.\* Xerxes is referred to as Ahasuerus in the Bible.

Haman was his prime minister. As such, Xerxes trusted his judgment unreservedly and gave Haman blanket permission to carry out his desire to destroy the Jewish people who, in Haman's opinion, did not observe the king's laws (Esther 3:8-11). Wielding such power, Haman was poised to eradicate all Jews from the Persian Empire. Queen Esther stood alone against Haman's evil plotting, and, because God was with her, Haman was destined to fail. Haman's political and physical life ended in tragedy as his plans backfired. In poetic justice he was hanged on the gallows he had built for Mordecai.

The history of the Persian Empire and the story of Esther stand together. Often the stories told in the Bible are looked upon as having happened in faraway Bible lands with only a remote connection with the history we read in secular history books. But—as we see in the story of Esther—God's hand does rule in the affairs of individuals and nations. God's people are real people living in a real world—as real as the one in which we live today.

When the history of God's people is studied against the background of secular history we can see God's commitment to preserve His people.

But not only is God interested in protecting His people. He is also interested in individuals whose problems may not be as world-shaking. God is always there to guide us when we place our trust in Him.

\* SDA Bible Commentary,  
vol. 3, p. 460.

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At the time of writing, Paul Ware was a senior history major at Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Collegedale, Tennessee.

# Coincidence or Providence?

by Carla Manous

The book of Esther is a fascinating and well-written narrative. The story has interesting characters, a strong plot, suspense, and coincidence. Chapters 5-7 are perhaps the most interesting and pivotal chapters in the book. In three chapters, plans come to fruition and destruction in an exciting chain of events. As in any well-written short story the narrative changes, the pieces seem to fall in place, and the fate of the characters is realized. Esther has purposed to approach the king and plead the cause of her people. At the same time Haman has resolved to destroy Mordecai. Events are coming to a breaking point. On the night of the banquet King Ahasuerus, unable to sleep, requests a reading of the royal chronicles and learns of Mordecai's loyalty. Suddenly Haman comes to the court to seek Mordecai's death. Ironic? Definitely! We, the readers, are fascinated by the mechanics of the story, amazed by how neatly things work out. We thrill at the irony and coincidence of the situation.

How does this apply to us today? Well, has coincidence ever played a part in our experiences? How do we react to "coincidence" in our lives, specifically in our spiritual lives? When things have seemingly "fallen in place" spiritually or when a difficult situation has suddenly been resolved, how often do we pat ourselves on the back and congratulate ourselves for being in the right place at the right time? How often is an answered prayer passed off as a lucky break or the result of our own efforts? Yes, we thrill to "coincidence" in the narrative of our spiritual experiences, forgetting that God, the ultimate storyteller, uses "coincidence" not as a literary device to "pull things together," but as a tool in working out His will for us. God can, as illustrated in Esther, use coincidence to bring about the working of His will. Perhaps we need to take the time to examine the "coincidences" that occur in our daily spiritual lives. Here are some suggestions:

1. Keep a list of prayer requests and answered prayers. Study how these situations and requests have been resolved.
2. Keep track of your contacts with friends and acquaintances that have spiritual implications. Can you see God at work? What role has providence played?

It might be interesting to discover how many "lucky breaks" and "coincidences" from day to day are indeed elements in a much greater story—the story of God's will.

## REACT

What is the proper balance between human effort and trusting God to do everything for us?

## HOW TO

Key text:  
Proverbs 20:24

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## “Have Thine Own Way, Lord” by Renee Bassett

### OPINION

**Key text:**  
**John 14:6**

Many times we do not understand why God does the things He does. Sometimes we, as Christians, feel that God may have deserted us or has more important things to tend to when things don't go our way. Many of our dreams do not turn out the way we want them to, but God always thinks of us, cares for us, understands us, and most of all loves us.

Isaiah 55:8 talks about how our thoughts and ways are not necessarily in correlation with what God wants for us. For example, in a dating experience this is true. Often we find ourselves attracted to someone thinking they are the “perfect one” for us. As the relationship grows and progresses we are disillusioned. We wanted things to work out, and we can't understand why God let us get our feelings involved only to get them hurt. We need to realize that this must be a part of His plan. We should not give up on Him and His plan for us, because He never gives up on us.

Often times we have the perfect picture in our minds of how to fulfill God's plan in our lives. As with Esther, our intentions may be to serve God, but sometimes we find ourselves in situations where this seems unlikely or impossible. These are the times when we need to realize that God will use us where He sees fit, whether or not it is what we expect, or whether or not we end up in a king's palace like Esther. God will open doors.

“Our Heavenly Father has a thousand ways to provide for us, of which we know nothing.”\* Jesus knows the outcome of everything we do, and we need to trust Him. God has reasons for everything He does, though it may not seem clear to us at the time. Have you ever wondered why something happened and you thought things should not have happened that way? Later you realized that it was the best, though you just did not see it that way in the beginning.

God works in many indirect ways. Many of our dreams will come true and many of them will not. We just need to trust Him and He will guide us, just as He did Esther. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

\* *The Desire of Ages*,  
p. 330.

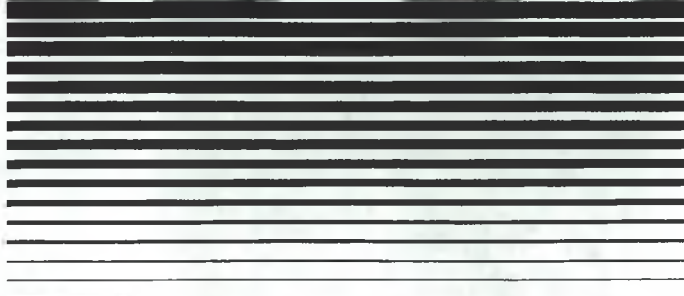
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Renee Bassett is a medical-records and office-administration major at Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Collegedale, Tennessee.



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# Flashback!

"Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts" (Psalm 105:1, 2, NIV).



# Trust Whom?

by Bob Folkenberg, Jr.

Anyone who would climb a ladder, stiffen up, and then fall backwards into the arms of strangers has got to be loco, no? But what about someone who climbs up and does the same thing, but falls backwards into the arms of friends whose life occupation is to catch people falling off ladders? That's not so dumb. Why?

Or what about the girl who is standing on top of a "four-high" in a gymnastics routine? Once she's up there and scared to death she hears this man, who just happened to walk in off the street, say, "Now, just do a forward flip, and I will catch you." If she did it I would think she was either seriously naive about human nature or lacking a few parts in her head! But if the person asking her to do the forward flip happened to be the coach she's had since she was 2 years old, then I wouldn't think she was crazy to follow his command. Why?

If you asked me to walk straight into an ocean and not to stop, even though I was carrying a couple hundred pounds on my shoulders, I would laugh at you. However,

if I knew you could make frogs come out of my shoes, lice appear in my hair, and darkness rule the day, and were able to kill all first-born in one night, I would jump right in. Why?

You've heard about final events? Earthquakes, fire, war, death penalty, cold nights of running from the beast people; and you are already scared to death about the whole thing, and it's not even here. Then someone says, "Take it easy, I will be with you always, even unto the end of the world." Somehow it doesn't help to squelch your fears. But then you remember—like a flash going off in your head—the One who said He would see you through created the universe, sustained it through eternity, and will do so forever. He provided eternal salvation for all who would accept it and has shown that He's got some seriously awesome power. With that in mind you can rest easier. Why? Trust. Yes, plain, simple trust. Just like that which you have with any good friend. You know He won't let you down, but will always see you through, because you and He are friends! Friends forever!

## INTRO- DUCTION.

Scripture:  
Esther 8-10

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# Riptide

by Gordon M. Hyde

**LOGOS** Theme: The deliverance of God's people in the past is our assurance of our deliverance in the future. As His people, we continually need to refresh our memories of God's actions in the past. Such remembrance will sustain and encourage us as we meet new trials and struggles. The rescue of Esther and her people is a part of every Christian's heritage.

## 1. When the Tide Turns

*"And the king took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman" (Esther 8:2, RSV).*

The book of Esther may not contain the name of God, and Luther may have denounced the book, but this idyll, this epic in five parts, climaxes in fairy-tale fashion. An unknown but ravishing young Jewish captive maid has been selected queen of the vast-but-fading empire of Ahasuerus, the Persian Xerxes. In the process Queen Esther's wily cousin, Mordecai, has vanquished his bitter rival in the king's court, the equally wily Haman.

The story is Noah's ark, Job's restoration, Isaac's birth, Joseph's promotion, Daniel's staying power, and Ruth's loyalty all rolled into one fantastically impossible reality. It is Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, Dante's *Divine Comedy* in Hebrew, Persian, and Septuagint Greek.

It is sheer music to a people destined to receive the "seal of God" while resisting to the death the enforcement of the near universal "mark of the beast." The theme is that the tide of divine providence will overrule human tragedy, the tide *does turn!* Just when it looks utterly, utterly impossible. It is the seventh game of the World Series. The game is down to the ninth inning, second half, the fielding side is three runs ahead, two men are out, no men on base, and no score in the inning. The count is no balls and two strikes. One strike, one tip, one easy fly, one almost anything, and the game is over, the series lost by the team at bat. The fans want to cheer, but can't. There is thinly veiled dread and gloom. But a roar explodes from the stands as the batter is hit by the third ball. A man is on. Two base hits follow. The bases are loaded. The next batter gets a fast ball just where he likes it, and that ball is gone! The tide has turned. That's Esther, Mordecai, and the Jews against Haman, his ten sons, and his craven henchmen. The tides had been ripping the beach with undertow, and the Jews were about to be swept out to sea, but the tide turned for them. It will for us, if we are ready to perish with Esther, and to believe, with Mordecai, that we have come to the kingdom for such a time as this. This is our hour!

*What Bible character went through a crisis similar to the one faced by the Jews in Persia? How was his crisis resolved? How will Christians at the end of time prevail? Genesis 32 and 33.*

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Gordon M. Hyde is chairman, division of religion, Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Collegedale, Tennessee.



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## 2. God and His People Invincible!

*"The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honor. . . . And many from the peoples of the country declared themselves Jews, for the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them" (Esther 8:16, 17, RSV).*

Countermanding the law of a king of the Medo-Persians that "changeth not" was tricky business. Whoever wrote the book of Esther was on the inside track of the Eastern mind and the inner workings of the Elamite empire.

But the Bible's interest in the great nations of the world centers on their dealings with the chosen people of God—the Hebrews of the Old Testament or the church of the New. It is almost incredible to realize that the beautiful young Jewess—Esther—was queen to the ruler of the most powerful nation on the earth at the time. And her sudden call to the high favor could hardly have been anticipated. Was former Queen Vashti's refusal to show herself before the king's guests a fluke, or a providence? On such small things destinies sometimes turn.

But it had set in motion a rapid chain of events that brought Esther to be queen and her cousin Mordecai to be a minor courtier at the palace at the same time. Together with their people, these two were confronted by the machinations of an utter rotter of a character—Haman. Miffed by Mordecai's unflinching refusal to prostrate himself when the pompous-but-crooked Haman, grand vizier of the kingdom, passed by, the latter set out to get even—and then some.

Timing is such a crucial factor in Bible stories, especially when a kingdom stretches 3,000 miles and there is nothing faster than a horse to carry the king's edicts to its remotest bounds. But the Persian post system was famed in its time for its speed and efficiency. And soon two countering edicts were chasing each other around the empire. The first, engineered by Haman through craft, flattery, and a bribe attempt; and the negating one obtained by the combined factors of the craft of Mordecai, the fact that the king "owed him one" (long forgotten), and the skillful and fearless maneuvering of an unseasoned Queen Esther. Suspense, drama, and the unbelievable confluence of equally unbelievable factors and forces—we have seen them all.

So today the Jews of the *diaspora* throughout the Persian realms are about to be wiped out by a typical Eastern potentate who has no grudge against them, but to whom people are only pawns on his vast board. Tomorrow, those same Jews have the right to protect themselves against their enemies. The death of Haman, impaled to the "gallows" he had erected for Mordecai high above the central courtyard of his own palace, for all Shushan to see, is the spark that sets a fire sweeping through the Persian satraps—all 127 provinces of them, from India's northwestern frontier to the northern boundaries of Ethiopia. The fear of God falls upon the enemies of the Jews, and the Jews become the toast of the Empire. But they take no plunder. They only ask their freedom. And proselytes flock to the standard of the Jehovah people when it is seen that God is with them.

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The story might end there, with Mordecai given both the palace and the power that had been Haman's, and Esther more than ever the undoubted queen—and in a way the story does end there. But it is not a forgotten story, for Mordecai introduced into the stream of Jewish history the Feast of Purim, which remains as a reminder of their miraculous deliverance. This feast they remember and observe to this day.

The riptides of conflicting decrees are about to involve the whole world. Who knows but that *we* are come to the kingdom for such an awesome time as this. "O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples! Sing to him, sing praises to him, tell of all his wonderful works!" (Ps. 105:1, 2, RSV).

*What can God's people today learn from this? Do we regularly and systematically remember and celebrate God's leading in our lives? What high points can you think of in Seventh-day Adventist history where God has worked in dramatic ways? How could we memorialize such occasions?*

# In Esther, a Promise

by Tim Peters

## TESTIMONY

Key text:  
Esther 8:2-9

Unfortunately, we do not always recognize the parallel between the experience of Esther and Mordecai and the coming crisis of the remnant church. In the picture of Esther's hand reaching for the scepter, we see God ensuring the safety of His children. Again, as those of the remnant consider this story, a story of the rescue of a nation, they may be certain that they too stand behind the deft sword of God's protection. As we realize the promise in Esther, failure becomes a lost concept.

"Angels that excel in strength had been commissioned by God to protect His people while they gathered themselves together, and 'stood for their lives.'

"The trying experiences that came to God's people in the days of Esther, were not peculiar to that age alone. . . . The same spirit that actuated those who persecuted the true church in ages past, will lead Protestants to pursue a similar course toward those who will maintain their loyalty to God. . . .

"The decree which is to go forth against the people of God will be very similar to that issued by Ahasuerus against the Jews in the time of Esther. The Protestant world today see, in the little company keeping the Sabbath, a Mordecai in the gate. His character and conduct, expressing reverence for the law of God, are a constant rebuke to those who have cast off the fear of the Lord, and are trampling upon His Sabbath; the unwelcome intruder must by some means be put out of the way.

"The same masterful spirit that plotted against the faithful in ages past is still seeking to rid the earth of those who fear God and obey His law. Satan will excite indignation against the humble minority who conscientiously refuse to accept popular customs and traditions. Men of position and reputation will join with the lawless and the vile to take counsel against the people of God. Wealth, genius, education, will combine to cover them with contempt. Persecuting rulers, ministers, and church-members will conspire against them. With voice and pen, by boasts, threats, and ridicule, they will seek to overthrow their faith. By false representations and angry appeals, they will stir up the passions of the people. Not having a 'thus saith the Scriptures' to bring against the advocates of the Bible Sabbath, they will resort to oppressive enactments to supply the lack. To secure popularity and patronage, legislators will yield to the demand for Sunday laws. Those who fear God can not accept an institution that violates a precept of the decalogue. On this battle-field comes the last great conflict of the controversy between truth and error. And we are not left in doubt as to the issue. Now, as in the days of Esther and Mordecai, the Lord will vindicate His truth and His people."\*

## REACT

1. In what ways may one now be a "Mordecai in the gate"?
2. What is the most important thing we as Adventists should be doing to prepare for the time of trouble?

\* Excerpted from Ellen G. White, "The Return of the Exiles—No. 11: In the Days of Queen Esther," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Jan. 23, 1908.

Tim Peters is a freshman chemistry major at Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Collegedale, Tennessee.

# God Has a Plan

by Bill Bass

## EVIDENCE

Key text:  
Esther 10:1-3

Should God's people hold high offices in the government? Should we encourage our students to run for such political offices? As Adventists we hold the view that there should be separation between church and state. But our text explains that Mordecai was second to the king, a type of vice-president in the government. Mordecai is not the only one in the Bible who became strong in politics. Obviously there were the kings of the Israelites, such as Saul and David. But the Bible also speaks of those who became great in secular kingdoms. Daniel became ruler over the province of Babylon (Dan. 2:48). Also, Joseph was set over all the land of Egypt, and only the king was greater than he (Gen. 41:40, 41). If God was able to use these honorable people to do His service, then couldn't He also use you and me if we were in those same positions?

We know from prophecy that a time of trouble will come upon God's people at the end of time. Would it not be to the advantage of God's people to have someone in high political power, like Mordecai, to influence what will take place in the end of time? Couldn't God use someone in high political office today to do His will?

First, we must ask whether this would truly accomplish the will of God. Would the people of the world see the love that God's people have for their Saviour; or if threatened by destruction, would they love God out of fear? Moses was in a perfect position to become king and set God's people free. Was this not an ideal situation for God's people? But this was not what God had planned for the Israelites. God used a common shepherd to lead His people to the Promised Land.

When Christ came to this earth the people were expecting and desperately wanting someone who would overthrow the Roman government, a political savior—one who would release them from their bondage and persecution. But God had something better in mind for them. Yet, the children of God did not understand and therefore did not accept what God had to offer to His people.

Throughout the Bible we have been shown that God has always done what was best for His people, even though His people did not always agree at the time. Christ has a plan for His people, and you and I are part of that plan. God can use us when we become great political leaders like Mordecai and He can use us as common workers in His cause.

## REACT

Read Esther 10:3. Is it appropriate for God's people to occupy high places in government? To what extent should they seek to advance the cause of their religion while in those places? Was it a positive or negative characteristic for Mordecai to seek to promote the welfare of the Jews?

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Bill Bass is a student at Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Collegedale, Tennessee.



# It Helps to Talk About It

by Carol Loree

**HOW TO**  
**Key text:**  
**Psalms 107:2**

History repeats itself. Everybody believes that. My mother did. When my sister and I jumped up and down on the bed the old frame finally broke, and my mother made the rule that we couldn't jump up and down on the bed anymore, even after it was fixed. She reasoned that if it happened once it would happen again. And my sister and I didn't want what transpired when my mother found out that we had broken the bed, so we didn't jump up and down on the bed anymore. At 8 and 10 years old we knew that history would repeat itself.

Fashion retailers bank on that principle when they begin selling wool sweaters in late August. People don't need wool sweaters in August, but they buy on faith that it will become cold again this year. Wool-sweater merchants are glad that history repeats itself.

Christians are glad too, because when they read the evidence that God has led in the past, they believe that it happens over and over. That's encouraging, because the record is that God ALWAYS wins. I like that. He has numberless ways of rigging the right situation, at the right moment, with the right people, to accomplish His purposes. One important factor is that the right people make themselves available for His use, and that they don't get bogged down with whether it *looks* as though they're winning. God ALWAYS wins.

He won the deliverance of His people by using Esther at the right moment. Some people are uncomfortable with the messy slaughtering of the Jews' enemies. It isn't characteristic of our loving God to condone that. It wasn't characteristic of Him to allow the wise Solomon, God's man, to have scads of wives either. Even with the corruption of today, we don't look very fondly upon that. So either there is more to the story than we're told, which is an indication of its relevance, or God must work with people where they are—in whatever state of ignorance. The point we must not miss is that God delivers.

So, if we are dependent on God in a day-to-day relationship, and if we are convinced that God never loses, then why are we ever discouraged? Why do we ever feel defeated? Why do we feel, now and then, that there is no light at the end of the tunnel?

I think it has a lot to do with the amount of time we spend concentrating on spiritual things. It's the time we spend talking spontaneously with friends about God's work in our lives. Has he led you in the past? How far has He brought you in your Christian experience? Do you have situations in your personal history that show evidence of His involvement with you? Has he led you to a spouse, job, or home? Do you ever think about these things, and do we not normally talk about what's on our minds?

Retrospect gives hope for the future, and talking about our experiences reinforces the fact that God is still running things.

## REACT

What does the inclusion of the book of Esther in the Bible tell us about God's attitudes and dealings with us? Can we have the courage to witness like Esther did?

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Carol Loree is a graphic artist at an advertising agency in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

# The Tragedy of Esther

by George William Turner

## OPINION

Key text:  
John 15:5

One of my mother's favorite expressions was "God helps those who help themselves." For years I assumed this tidbit of wisdom was tucked safely away in Psalms or Proverbs somewhere, and I was rather surprised when, in my junior year of high school, I discovered that the line had been written by Ben Franklin, a man who didn't give God as we know Him much credit for anything.

The more one knows about God and salvation, however, the more the idea of God's helping those who help themselves seems like a contradiction. Look at Abraham; the more he tried to help God's plan along, the more muddled things became (see Genesis 12 and 16 for a couple of examples). The message is that God delivers on His promises.

But we're not talking about Abraham; we're talking about Esther, and the water is considerably cloudier. The only message I see in the last three chapters of Esther tells me not to mess with the Jews when Esther is around. God is not the hero here; in fact, if we take the book of Esther at face value, God had nothing to do with this deliverance at all. And although that idea didn't settle with me at first, the more I've thought about it, the more sense it makes.

Nearly all classical literature deals with human triumph or failure. *The Odyssey*, *Agamemnon*, *Medea*—all somehow celebrate the paradox of humanity. The one glaring exception to this is the ancient Hebrew writings, which admit the human condition but channel all glory to the living God. All the "heroes" of the Old Testament are but instruments in the hands of their Creator.

The book of Esther, however, is different. In my studies, I don't recall seeing God even mentioned. All credit seems to be given to our heroine, and admittedly, she seems to be rather noble, with her "If I perish, I perish" speech and all. But before we nominate her for sainthood, I think it would be good to bring up the fact that we are talking about a *condemned woman*. It's not quite so heroic to tempt death when you're going to die in a month or two anyway.

I realize that this sounds cynical, and it's bordering on sacrilegious, but I'm trying to make a point. Far be it from me to say that God had nothing to do with the Jews' dramatic deliverance. But that's the message I'm getting from the book. It's almost as if they claimed to believe that God *would* have delivered them (Mordecai makes this clear in chapter 4, verse 14), but just to be on the safe side, they pulled a few strings to save themselves. My question is: If they had trusted more in God's promise of deliverance, could the loss of nearly 76,000 lives have been avoided? Would the Lord have received the glory instead of the queen?

I'm not knocking Esther; I like to fancy myself a hero, and under like circumstances I hope I'd do what I could to save my people.

## REACT

When the day came, how did the Jews relate to their enemies? Esther 9:5-10, 16. Do you feel their actions were justified? Or was it taking unfair advantage of the situation? Why?

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George William Turner is a copywriter and free-lance author/illustrator in Collegedale, Tennessee.



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