



## When the King could not Sleep

*“That night the king could not sleep”*

(Esther 6:1)

For one reason or another the king could not sleep. “So what?” somebody might say. “Doesn't this happen to millions of people every night?” It's common knowledge that people spend millions of dollars for sleeping pills to remedy this problem. Also that as people get older they don't sleep as well. Here a king can't sleep a certain night. Is this worth mentioning? I'm sure that President Reagan and Prime Minister Mulroney have nights like this too. But that is not made known to the public. It's not important enough to mention.

This incident is important, for it's the indirect cause of a turn of events that affects the whole history of the church of Christ. Solomon says that the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord as courses of water, directing it wherever He pleases. This sleepless night was controlled by the Lord, and let us thank God that it was.

To understand this apparently insignificant incident in the life of the king of Persia, we should recall the history of Israel.

Following the split in Israel under Rehoboam, the kingdom was divided into two kingdoms, those of Judah and Israel. The latter lasted 255 years and then was taken away into captivity by the Assyrians, never to return. Judah after 400 years was taken away by Nebuchadnezzar into Babylon. He deported all of the people, taking them away from their homes and all they had, and resettled them in far away Babylon (as Hitler at one time had plans to deport all of the Netherlands' people to Poland in the last World War). While Israel was in Babylon the Medes and Persians conquered the Babylonians and subsequently Israel was under the rule of the Persians. It was during the reign of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the remnant of Israel returned to the promised land. Jerusalem was rebuilt, including its temple. Here God continued His covenant though most of the Jews remained in the land of captivity.

In the course of time Xerxes, also called Auerus became king of Persia, ruling over that large area of the Middle East, which included the land of Canaan. Xerxes planned to have a large feast, in which all of the dignitaries of his empire would take part. It was to last 180 days – a half year! Drinks apparently “flowed freely.” At one time when the king apparently had drunk too much, he wanted to show to his many guests his beautiful wife, Vashti. He wanted her to be “put on display,” perhaps in some kind of model show. But she refused. As a result, she was divorced and no longer queen. After all, the whole realm must know that no woman is going to treat the king with such disrespect and disobedience.

Now the king had to have another queen. Where would he find one? Following a long “beauty contest” in which each contestant had to spend one night with the king, Esther, a Jewish girl, was chosen to be the next queen. She kept her identity hidden, for the Jews were already unpopular. Helping her was her cousin Mordecai who had adopted her as an orphan.

Although Mordecai and Esther show much love for and loyalty to the Jewish people, the name of God is not mentioned once in the whole book of Esther. How different this is from the history and lives of men like Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and others!

Haman, the king's right hand man, knew Mordecai and that he was a Jew. Haman hated him with a passion because Mordecai would not bow down before him. Haman influenced the king to make a law that on a certain day, the 13th of the 12th month of the year (Adar) in all of the king's

provinces, i.e. in all of the empire, the hated Jews could be killed, young and old, women and children. Haman had a tall gallows made on which he wanted Mordecai to be hung. The next morning he would ask the king for permission to do so.

That night the king could not sleep. Orders were given that one of his servants read to him. Part of the king's diary was read. Providentially what was read was a record of how some time ago two men had tried to assassinate the king, their plans were known and exposed by Mordecai, and the king's life was saved.

"What reward did Mordecai get", the king asked. The reply was, "None." Mordecai was given special honors for this deed of bravery and the king held him in high esteem. Just at that time, when the king was informed what Haman wanted to do with Mordecai, he, in great anger, ordered Haman to be hung on his own gallows. But the law remained that on the announced day all of the Jews could be killed. Because no law of the Medes and Persians could be changed, the king made a new law that on that day the Jews could defend themselves and take advantage especially of those who hated them. The result was that that day became one of great victory for the Jews and became celebrated as a national holiday by them. This complete change in the course of history all started when the king could not sleep.

In all this we can and should see the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember that if the first law of the king had remained in effect all the Jews could be killed including the godly remnant in the land of Palestine. If Haman's request and wish had been carried out, all of the church would have been destroyed, including the royal seed from which Christ was to be born.

In the past the Lord had always saved His church. His promise "stood fast." The same thing would happen again. Not even the greatest kings would destroy His cause. He was faithful to His Word and will remain faithful. Sometimes He "works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform." Thus we see that the very sleeplessness of the king was by the Lord's appointment. The book of Esther, in the canon of the Old Testament, reveals to us this glorious truth. God will always save His church.

What security and peace God's people can find in this truth! His promises are still with us. He will always keep His church. The cause of Christ His Son, will always be victorious. We don't always see this, as the cause of the devil and the gates of hell often appear to have the upper-hand. In many respects today, the cause of the church seems to be losing ground. Sometimes this is due to lack of spirituality in the church. But this is not always so. Think of the dark ages in the history of Europe. Today we can't help but feel concerned about our children, and grandchildren, when we think of the future. One doesn't have to be a pessimist today to see that the cause of the church in general is not flourishing.

We must not forget that our God controls even the times when kings and rulers cannot sleep. He controls their minds and hearts, as "river courses", says Solomon. Water has no resistance. The Lord controls all things, even the hearts of kings, presidents, prime ministers and dictators. God's control is all-embracing and all-comprehensive, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Although common people such as you and I are completely helpless regarding decisions and happenings in our countries and the history of the nations, our Lord controls even the sleeplessness of kings.

In His father-love the Lord counts the hairs on our heads. The Scriptures also tell us that He knows our sitting and rising, every time when we are going to sit down or stand up and go somewhere. He even knows our thoughts from afar, even before they enter our minds. In view of these assurances about the very smallest details of our lives, Romans 8:28 takes on added meaning,

*"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, that are called according to His purpose."*

Taught such truths, we must be children of faith. We must not try to be "back seat drivers," and/or worry about circumstances which are beyond our control. In "quietness and confidence" we shall be strong, says Isaiah. And one of the psalmists wrote *"Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him."* We must try to confess the first words of Psalm 23, including the second part, *"I shall not*

*want.*” Each day our heavenly Father knows every ruler in the world, how many hairs there are on their heads, their motives and desires, their standing and sitting and their thoughts from afar. And He controls them all.

*“Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”*

(Mark 9:24)

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