

Sing beforehand: Scripture versification 18-3:6,7

Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earthⁱ. Beloved, grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christⁱⁱ. By the powerful operation of God the Holy Spirit.
Amen

Psalm of praise: 119:3

Confession of faith: Apostle's Creed

*I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth:
And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord:
Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary:
Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried: He descended into hell:
The third day he rose again from the dead:
He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty:
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead:
I believe in the Holy Ghost:
I believe in the holy catholic church: the communion of saints:
The forgiveness of sins:
The resurrection of the body:
And the life everlasting. Amen. ⁱⁱⁱ*

The Law

¹And God spake all these words, saying,
²I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.
³Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
⁴Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.
⁵Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;
⁶And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.
⁷Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.
⁸Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.
⁹Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:
¹⁰But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates:
¹¹For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.
¹²Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.
¹³Thou shalt not kill.
¹⁴Thou shalt not commit adultery.
¹⁵Thou shalt not steal.
¹⁶Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.
¹⁷Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's. **Exodus 20:1-17 KJV**

We pray to God for the forgiveness of sins by singing **Psalm 86:1**

Prayer

- **Doxology:**
- **Worship:**
- **Confession:**
- **Supplication** (for pardon of sins):
- **Thanksgiving:**
- **Intercession**
(for the need of the congregation, the church, authorities, sinful world and appeal to the promises of God)
- **General supplication:**
- **Illumination of the Holy Spirit** (necessary for the ministry of the Word):

Psalm 34:8

Scripture reading: Esther

Scripture text: Esther 7:4

⁴For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage. (KJV)¹

¹ ⁴ For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. Had we been sold as male and female slaves, I would have held my tongue, although the enemy could never compensate for the king's loss." (NKJV)

This is the last bit of Israel's history before the start of the New Testament.

- Their exile is behind them. In the meantime Darius had become king of the Babylonian empire.
- After Darius's death, his son Xerxes became king in his place. Xerxes also had another name: Ahasuerus².
- Ahaseurus had no personality. Herodotus, the Greek historian of the time wrote that Ahaseurus was frivolous and fickle by nature.

The Bible underscores this fact.

- At a drunken party before one of his battles, his wife Vashti refused to obey him.
- The king answered her disobedience by having her beheaded.
- A new queen was then sought from amongst the best looking woman in the land.

Which is how it happened that a Jewish girl became queen.

- She was one of the Jews who did not return to Palestine.
- The meaning of this history is then also that the Lord therein reveals that He preserves what (who) belongs to him, no matter where in world they are.

Ahaseurus had a favourite in his court, named Haman.

- Haman was a descendant of Agag, the king of the Amalekites, the enemy against whom Saul was supposed to have marched and anathematise.
- In his weakness king Ahaseurus issued a decree that everybody must bow down before Haman when he is close by.

The similarity between the two groups of adverseries (Saul/Amalekites and Mordecai/Haman) goes further, because Saul was also a Benjaminite.

- And so too Mordecai, Esther's uncle, was a Benjaminite

In those times the Eastern kings were viewed as gods.

- So that when Ahaseurus issued the decree that everyone had to bow down before Haman, it meant that he awarded divine powers to him.
- To bow down before Haman is thus nothing other than idolatry.

And that caused tension in the palace.

- Everyone bowed down before Haman - only one Jew did not.
- This Jew bowed before no one except God - he was Mordecai the Benjaminite.

Characteristic of the Eastern heathens, this transgression could not be tolerated.

- Haman did not wish only Mordecai's death
- He knew that there were many Jews who did not recognize him as a deity
- And with satanic trickery he conspired to have all the Jews killed.

He requested Ahaseurus' permission to murder all the Jews.

- To ensure the king's consent he promised him a sum of money equal to the taxes the king would have received from the Jews in one year, had they lived.

But the Lord always delivers His elect from danger.

- This case was no different. Esther is queen – by Providence she had access to the king, for the sake of her people. Esther prepared a feast for the king. She personally invites him to the meal, and she invites him to bring Haman along too.

The king was clearly aware that something was up.

- The first clues were to be seen on her appearance – because by then she had already fasted for three days.
- Three days without food, and being under a terrible strain, does not leave a woman looking her best.

That she also did not immediately state the cause of her worry, led the king to assume that the cause must have been very grave indeed.

- Which motivated his excessive promise to her that he would grant whatever she desires, even half of his kingdom.

The king is very tense.

- Probably in part on account of his favorite wife's unusual behavior
- The Bible is clear on the fact that the king made no secret of his fondness for Esther.

That is the background to the meal around which these people were gathered.

- They finished their meal and were drinking wine.

² Ahasuerus in Esther 2:1 KJV and Xerxes in Esther 2:1 NIV, also commonly transliterated Achashverosh

- At which point the king requested Esther to tell him her wish – he was anxious to know what was going on with her.

Without hesitation, but still respectfully Esther starts:

“If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request.

Vehement but also moving.

Can you imagine what confusion and shock must have flashed through the king’s mind at that moment?

- In his palace, his wife asks him to spare her life.
- Someone is making an attempt on his beloved wife’s life
 - In an Eastern palace that was an unpardonable transgression
- She continues her plea: **For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated**

She puts her own life first.

- She employs female trickery to in this way remind him of his affection for her, and that she may surely now reckon on his protection.
- But there is now mention of another people, Xerxes must have started realizing that his beloved wife is a Jewess – not a Babylonian.

Perhaps the king was also partly enraged because this beloved wife of his had betrayed him.

- On Mordecai’s recommendation she never before revealed her identity – she consciously concealed the fact.

The hatred with which Haman conspired against the Jews is also evident when Esther presents his planned extermination of them as nothing more than a trade agreement.

- The accumulated violence of destroy, kill and annihilate are the exact terms of Haman’s contract.

Then Ahasuerus realised how Haman swindled him.

- Esther would have to be killed because a Persian decree could never be revoked.
- His ignorance could have cost him his throne if it had come to light that his own wife was a Jew.
- If he was not up to date with this fact, then clearly he could also not be considered fit to rule the people...

Esther has more arguments. She wants to thoroughly expose Haman.

- There may never again be any chance of him influencing the king with his artifice
- Even though Haman was to have paid the king one year’s worth of taxes in place of the Jews who were to be murdered, the annihilation would still cost the king dearly.
- The damage caused would be incalculable: what about the taxes of the second and third years – who would pay those?
- In the long run, the decree in question would come at a very high price.

The king is undoubtedly impressed.

- Who did this thing? Who is he and where is he in whose heart it had come up to do such a thing?
- The king eventually grasped the disastrous consequences.

Then the breaking point

- The adversary and enemy is this evil Haman
- That is the reason for having him at the meal
- Esther needed to be present so that Haman could not spin the case behind her back

In his anger the king gets up from the table and goes outside to find fresh air. Haman and Esther remain behind.

- He realised that the king’s mind is now filled with evil thoughts towards him, and that he is in deep trouble.
- He also realises that there is now only one person left who can be of help to him – Esther.

He falls down before her where she is seated on the couch.

- Unfortunately for him, the king returned at that very moment
- And he makes his own deductions

Esther noticed that the king had read the situation wrong, but she does not correct him.

- As it concerns Esther and the Lord, this is the moment when the truth caught up with Haman, and he is punished accordingly.
- The slaves pronounce sentence over Haman on behalf of the king when they grab him and conceal his eyes.

Which means that he may no longer look upon the king. And that he will receive the death penalty.

- It has always been favour shown to someone if he may look upon the king, and Haman has forfeited this favor.
- He went too far – he tempted God by seeking the destruction of His people.

The meaning is clear. Haman and his conduct represent the devil's work and the tricks he employs against the faithful – not necessarily only against the Jews – they represent God's children through the ages.

The meaning of this bit of history is that by their actions Esther and Mordecai teach:

- Amidst the violence and murder thought up by the devil and his forces: God is mightier still.
- In any and all circumstances He still protects those who belong to Him
- He is so powerful that He not only provides for His people by leading them, but also by destroying their enemies.

God is always victorious, because it is not possible to erase truth with lies.

- The victory of the Lord is symbolically depicted in this history by Mordecai who takes up Haman's seat, when he is appointed in Haman's place after his execution.

It is gripping that Christ Jesus, the coming Light, is so strikingly proclaimed in this bit of history.

- Esther means "star" – evening star.
- Evening star because after the history of Esther, the Jewish people disappeared into darkness for centuries.
- Not a single page in the Bible speaks of that dark period.

Then the Bright Morning Star appears – Jesus Christ.

- Just as Benjamin is restored to honor in the glory of Esther, so the Lord Jesus Christ restores a sin-fallen lost humanity in the holiness of God's grace.
- The Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross – whereby He restored mankind in holiness after in Adam, we were previously lost in sin.
- His death was the punishment for our sin.

The Lord Jesus prepares a feast – like Esther- where He proclaims His victory over Satan: the Lord's Supper.

- The day after instituting the Lord's Supper, he executed His punishment of Satan when He died, and when by His resurrection, He broke the hold that death had over the elect.
- We recall that Satan also entered into a Haman's transaction with us:
 - He promised us the glory of being gods
 - As reward for our obedience to him we gained
 - A warped understanding of truth
 - And all the anxiety and bitterness of hell

On the evening when the Lord instituted the Lord's Supper, someone with a Haman's attitude was also present – Judas.

- In his mind's eye Judas already saw the glimmer of money which he exchanged the Lord for, while he was seated at the same table with Him.
- Thirty shekels of silver awaited him if he betrayed the Lord
- And like Haman he dies with a rope around his bold deed.

With Jesus, Satan joined up with more forces, because heathen and churchgoer worked together at the crucifixion.

- The devil's heart was jubilant – just like Haman's
- But it meant his own execution – he fell from heaven like a lightning bolt when in His own power, the Lord rose from the grave.

After the crucifixion and resurrection the devil never again has any place in or access to the kingdom of the Victor. Residence in the Kingdom of God is our destiny – we who have been hallowed by the reconciliation wrought for us by the Lord Jesus.

Amen.

Closing prayer

Versification 1-1:3

²⁴The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: ²⁵The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: ²⁶The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace^v

Amen.

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ⁱ Psalm 124:8

ⁱⁱ 1 Corinthians 1:3

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.ccel.org/creeds/apostles.creed.html>

^{iv} Numbers 6:24-26