

Esther (pt.2)

“Invisible presence” indeed!

For Thou hast **hidden Thy face** from us, and hast delivered us into the power of our iniquities. ISAIAH 64:7

Truly, Thou art a **God who hides Himself**, O God of Israel, Savior!
ISAIAH 45:15

3 More Problems for Jehovah's Witnesses – & other modern rationalists

1. Why is the NAME missing from an inspired book?

Compare Gen. 39:9; 40:18; 41:16,25,28,32,51,52; Dan. 2:28,29,37,44,45; 4:24,25,26. Were Joseph and Daniel Jehovah's Witnesses?

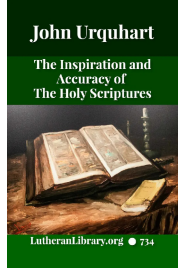
A remarkable and unique feature of the Book of Esther is the complete absence of the name of God, and indeed, apart from the mention of fasting, of any direct reference to Divine Providence and Judaism. It is almost universally agreed that **this omission must have been intentional**. The author seems at times even to go out of his way to avoid mention of the Divine Name (e.g. v. 14). **The reason for the omission can only be surmised.** [S. Goldman, *Esther* (Soncino Bible) 194]

With this remnant, feeble indeed, and few in number, the Lord is pleased in grace to connect His name, although the Lo-ammi sentence remains unrepealed; for we find that if the Name is absent in recording His care over those who remained in Babylon, it is abundantly present in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which detail the experiences of the remnant to who the place of the Name was precious, as it could not be to those who abode elsewhere -- even in ease and comparative luxury. It is true it is as "the God of heaven" He makes Himself known to them; but what title more suitable when all earthly glory had departed? and to heaven they now looked for the coming Anointed Deliverer. [Harry Ironside, *Esther* 10]

C.H. Gordon (*Introduction to Old Testament Times* [Ventnor, N.J.: Ventnor, 1953], pp. 278f.) has called attention to an Iranian doctrine called *Kitman* or *taqiyya* that has survived to the present, which allows a person to deny his faith and pretend to be part of another religion when faced with personal danger. He believes that was the practice Esther followed, and later the Persians who out of fear pretended to be Jews for the same reason (8:17). [F.B. Huey, Jr., *Esther* (Expositor's Bible Commentary) 807]



What means this persistent silence, this Divine "hush!" whenever the sacred penman approaches the mention of anything that will link the names of Israel and of God together? This silence, so peculiar, so passing strange, in a book given by inspiration of God, has not been understood. The Alexandrian Jews, who translated the Old Testament into Greek some 300 or 200 years before the Christian era ... apparently felt that they could not let the book of Esther go out in this condition. They, therefore, put a long prayer into the mouth of Mordecai, and a still longer one into the mouth of Esther. This is how *man* would have written the book ... it seems to me that this significant absence of the name of God takes us still farther. It is prophetic. These Persian Jews are the types of their fellow-countrymen who were afterwards to reject God's salvation in Christ, and who, scattered among the nations, were again and again to be threatened with destruction. God's name and theirs have not been bound together for 1800 years. -- [John Urquhart, *The Inspiration and Accuracy of the Holy Scriptures* 151,153 (writing about 1900 AD)]



2. Eternal Providence -- Is the "Invisible presence" only since 1914?

... that sleep should fail him just on that night was to the Rabbis, not a mere coincidence, but evidence of God's intervention. It may be noted again how the author seems **carefully to refrain from mentioning the Deity**, from any other Biblical author we should expect some such phrase as "The Lord took away the King's sleep." -- S. Goldman, *op.cit.*, 222,223

It is said that the name of God does not occur in the story, a statement which both is and is not true. God is here in mystery, though not in manifestation. The objection to the Book that the Divine name does not occur in it, itself gives us the key to it. God's actions are manifest, but He Himself is veiled. Further, it has been shown that the incommunicable Name, of Tetragrammaton, Y.H.W.H., which stand in the Hebrew for Yahweh (Jehovah), occurs in this narrative four times in acrostic form and at the critical points in the story (i. 20; v.4,13; vii. 7), a fact which cannot possibly be of chance, but of Divine design, and which demonstrates, as hardly anything else could the outstanding truth of **Divine providence**. -- [W. Graham Scroggie, *Know Your Bible* (n.d.) 94,95]



Joyce Baldwin

"The survival of the state of Israel requires an explanation"

We recall a well-known story of modern days, when a powerful monarch asked one of his leading Christian subjects whether he could tell him in one short sentence a clear proof of the truth of Christianity, and the answer was, not in a sentence, but in one word -- ISRAEL! When we confine ourselves to the last 2000 years ... surely we cannot fail to be struck with the preservation and continuance of the Jews as a separate people. Everything apparently has been done by man to blot them out from the page of history, and if hatred, contempt, and violence could have done so they had long ceased to exist. Where is Assyria now, and where Babylon, and where the great Seleucidian [Greek] empire? They have long ceased to be. But the Jews, on whom they trampled, and who have been trodden on still more by the modern nations, they are still as distinct as, and perhaps more numerous than, they ever were. -- J. Elder Cumming, *Esther* (Devotional Commentary) 148]

The survival of the state of Israel requires an explanation. Here is a fact of history which seems to witness to a divine overruling of events even more extraordinary than those "coincidences" of the Esther story. Controversial and painful as the interpretation may be, the fact itself cannot be ignored. The **unseen hand** behind the events in Susa is no less active in guiding history today. The book of Esther is still relevant. -- [Joyce G. Baldwin, *Esther* (Tyndale Old Testament Commentary) 42]

3. Are the Abrahamic Covenant's blessings and curses cancelled by Israel's disobedience? (Gen. 12:3)

Compare Nahum 1:1,2, 11-15; Obadiah 1,2,10-12 -- **in what spiritual condition** was Israel when Nahum and Obadiah uttered their curses upon Nineveh and Edom? How does Jehovah reconcile His judgments on Israel, "My people" (Obad. 13), with these irreversible pronouncements upon two peoples? (Jer. 30:11)

The Lord remembers, too, His word as to Amalek spoken in the wilderness so long ago: "I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." Hence we read of the destruction of the last of the nations mentioned in Scripture. ... The last of this ungodly race have perished. God's word, whether telling of grace or judgment, will be fulfilled to the letter. -- [Harry Ironside, *Esther* 102]

Through the defeat of Haman's evil intentions the whole empire had entered a period of peace and well-being, blessed through the descendants of Abraham (Gn. 12:3), though still more profound blessings were part of the purpose of the far-reaching prophecy.-- [Joyce Baldwin, *Esther* (Tyndale Old Testament Commentary) 115,116]

But, though His care is over all His saints, it will always be observed that there is not that same direct, manifest interference on their behalf when not walking according to His revealed will, as when they take the place of absolute dependence on Himself in subjection to His Word. Thus also in Christendom generally, it is more this distant Providential oversight that is known. ... An old Puritan once wrote, "If you marry a child of the devil you can expect to have trouble with your father-in-law." Alas, that so many, despising the Word of truth and the bitter experience of thousands before them, should, with open eyes, yet venture on such a course, because through their affections they have been ensnared! How many Samsons have been thus shorn of their strength! And how many Solomons have thus had their hearts turned away! -- [Harry Ironside, *Esther* 110,111]

For the Jewish people it [the book of Esther] has been the ground for hope in their ongoing sufferings. They have looked for vindication and they have not been disappointed. Christians for their part cannot dismiss the Jews from their reckoning. The providence of God continues to be traceable in their survival and in the establishment of their state of Israel, and it behoves the Christian to stand in awe (Rom. 11:20). -- [Joyce G. Baldwin, *op.cit.*, 52]



And I will wait for Yahweh, who is **hiding His face** from the house of Jacob.
ISAIAH 8:17

Your Teacher will **no longer hide** Himself, but your eyes will behold your Teacher. ISAIAH 30:20

In an outburst of anger I **hid my face** from you for a moment; But with everlasting lovingkindness I will have compassion on you, says Yahweh your Redeemer. ISAIAH 54:8

Bible Study for Jehovah's Witnesses: **ESTHER**

1:1-2:7 What is the approximate date of the events narrated in the book of Esther, and how many generations (at least) had passed from the exile of Jeconiah King of Judah (597 BC)?

Mordecai's great-great-grandfather Kish, according to 2:5, was a contemporary of Nebuchadnezzar and Jeconiah. By the Hebrew measure, then, 3 generations brings us about 100 years, well into the Persian era. We are not surprised, therefore, to find Ahasuerus identified as Xerxes the Great, who reigned from 485 - 465 B.C.

2:8-20 Does the narrator consider Esther's elevation to queen of Persia (v.17) a forfeiture of her Jewishness, or her God?

Compare the station of Joseph (Gen. 39:2; 41:38-41) and Daniel (Dan.5:7,11,29; 6:1-4). Could Esther, Joseph or Daniel have been baptized as Jehovah's Witnesses?

2:21-3:8 How had Jehovah proved faithful to his people, even while they suffered the punishment of exile? (Lev.26:44,45)

Compare Jer. 30:10,11. Even Balaam, who would have cursed Israel, could only bless them, under the overwhelming power of the Holy Spirit: *Behold, a people who dwells apart, he prophesied, And shall not be reckoned among the nations* (Num. 23:8,9). Even as Balaam uttered this prophecy, we must note, that disobedient generation of Israel was perishing in the wilderness. Yet even as lowly Israel's future was assured, by contrast Agag the Amalekite, the **first** (i.e. greatest) of the nations, should perish for cursing God's people (24:7-9,19,20). Saul, the first king of Israel, had the privilege of fulfilling Balaam's prophecy (some 400 years later) but his failure to wipe out the Amalekites (and their King Agag) cost Saul the throne (1 Samuel 15). Would that Saul could have foreseen what this disobedience would nearly cost Israel at the hands of Agag's descendants! (Esther 3:1,10)

3:9-4:14 It has often been suggested that the book of Esther has little to offer the Christian. But what great truth is underlined by Mordecai's faith at this hour of Satanic, genocidal anti-Semitism? (esp. 4:14)

Compare Joseph's philosophy of history, Gen. 45:3-9.

4:15-6:11 How do circumstances come together to reveal a Hidden Hand in the protection of Israel?

6:12-7:10 What truth announced by Balaam does Haman learn?

For there is no omen against Jacob, nor is there any divination against Israel (Num. 23:23). The enemies of the Jews would yet have to realize the truth of Balaam's next utterance, *At the proper time it shall be said to Jacob and to Israel, what God has done. Behold a people rises like a lioness, and as a lion it lifts itself; It shall not lie down until it devours the prey, and drinks the blood of the slain* (Numbers 23:23b,24).

8:1-9:19 Not for the first time, the irrevocable -- yet not inspired -- decree of a Persian king leads to near-catastrophe for God's servants, and death for the king's own subjects! (cf. Daniel 6, esp. vv.8,12,15) How was this greatest of earth's rulers trapped by the pride of his position?

9:20-32 Although Christians like Martin Luther may see little for the Christian in Esther, what have Jews always found in its pages?

10:1-3 The brief postscript underlines what promise of its Hidden Author?