

A Tale of Two Empires

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 October 2018

Preacher: Paul Brennan

[0 : 0 0] Well, we're going to turn to our Bibles now and to the Old Testament and the book of Esther. If you have one of the visitor's Bibles, I think that is page 410.

Otherwise, turn to, well, towards the end of the Old Testament after Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and then Esther. And Paul is beginning a new series this evening in this very dramatic book, which you'll remember not too long ago we studied Nehemiah.

And that was all about the exiles coming back from Persia to Jerusalem to rebuild there. Well, this is the same period in history. This is where there are still some Jews out of the land in Persia.

And here's a story that's going on in that part of the world. And very dramatic it is, too. We're going to read together the first two chapters. So if you'd like to follow with me, Esther chapter 1 at verse 1.

Now in the days of Ahasuerus, Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia, over 127 provinces. In those days, when King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in Susa, the capital, in the third year of his reign, he gave a feast for all his officials and servants.

[1 : 2 6] The army of Persia and Media and the nobles of the governors of the provinces were before him. While he showed the riches of his glory and the splendor and pomp of his greatness for many days, 180 days.

When these days were completed, the king gave for all the people present in Susa, the citadel, both great and small, a feast lasting for seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace.

There were white cotton curtains and violet hangings fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rods and marble pillars.

And also couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother of pearl and precious stones. Drinks were served in golden vessels, vessels of different kinds.

And the royal wine was lavished according to the bounty of the king. And drinking was according to this edict. There was no compulsion. For the king had given orders to all the staff of his palace to do as each man desired.

[2 : 3 3] Queen Vashti also gave a feast for the women in the palace that belonged to King Ahasuerus. On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abgatha, Zether, and Carcas, and seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus.

Commanded them to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown in order to show the peoples and to the princes her beauty. Of course, she was lovely to look at. But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs.

At this, the king became enraged and his anger burned within him. And then the king said to the wise men who knew the times, for this was the king's procedure toward all who were versed in law and judgment.

The next men to him being Karshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Merez, Marcena, and Mehuman, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who saw the king's face and sat first in the kingdom.

According to the law, what is to be done to Queen Vashti? Because she has not performed the command of King Ahasuerus delivered by the eunuchs. Then, Mehuman said, in the presence of the king and of the officials, not only against the king has Queen Vashti done wrong, but also against all the officials and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus.

[4 : 09] But the queen's behavior will be made known to all the women, causing them to look at their husbands with contempt. Since they will say, King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, and she did not come.

This very day, the noble women of Persia and Media, who have heard of the queen's behavior, will say the same to all the king's officials, and there will be contempt and wrath in plenty.

If it please the king, let a royal order go out from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, so that it may not be repealed. That Vashti is never again to come before King Ahasuerus, and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she.

So, when the decree made by the king is proclaimed throughout all his kingdom, for it's vast, all women will give honor to their husbands, high and low alike. This advice pleased the king and the princes, and the king did as Mehuman proposed.

He sent letters to all the royal provinces, to every province in its own script, and to every people in its own language, that every man be master in his own household, and speak according to the language of his people.

[5 : 30] After these things, when the anger of King Ahasuerus had abated, he remembered Vashti and what he had done, and what had been decreed against her.

Then the king's young men who attended him said, let beautiful young virgins be sought out for the king, and let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom to gather all the beautiful young virgins to the harem in Susa, the capital under custody of Haggai, the king's eunuch, who's in charge of the women.

Let their cosmetics be given them. And let the young women who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti. This pleased the king, and he did so.

Now, there was a Jew in Susa, the citadel, whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminite, who'd been carried away from Jerusalem among the captives, carried away with Jeconiah, king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had carried away.

He was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, the daughter of his uncle, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at, and when her father and mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter.

[6 : 52] So when the king's order and his edict were proclaimed, and when many young women were gathered in Susa, the citadel, in custody of Haggai, Esther also was taken into the king's palace and put in custody of Haggai, who had charge of the women.

And the young woman pleased him and won his favor. And he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and her portion of food and with seven chosen young women from the king's palace and advanced her and her young women to the best place in the harem.

Esther had not made known her people or kindred, for Mordecai had commanded her not to make it known. And every day, Mordecai walked in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was and what was happening to her.

Now when the turn came for each young woman to go in to King Ahasuerus, after being 12 months under the regulations for the women, since this was the regular period of their beautifying, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and ointments for women, when the young woman went into the king in this way, she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the harem to the king's palace.

In the evening, she would go in, and in the morning, she would return to the second harem in custody of Shaskaz, the king's eunuch, who was in charge of the concubines.

[8 : 18] She would not go into the king again unless the king delighted in her, and she was summoned by name. When the turn came for Esther, the daughter of Abihai, the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his own daughter to go into the king, she asked for nothing except what Haggai, the king's eunuch, who now had charge of the women, advised.

Now Esther was winning favor in the eyes of all who saw her. And when Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign, the king loved Esther more than all the women.

And she won grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

Then the king gave a great feast for all his officials and servant. It was Esther's feast. He also granted her remission of taxes to the provinces and gave gifts with royal generosity.

Now, when the virgins were gathered together the second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. Esther had not made known her kindred or her people as Mordecai had commanded her, for Esther obeyed Mordecai just as when she was brought up by him.

[9 : 41] In those days, as Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the threshold, became angry and sought to lay hands on king Ahasuerus.

And this came to the knowledge of Mordecai, and he told it to Queen Esther. And Esther told the king in the name of Mordecai. When the affair was investigated and found to be so, the men were both hanged on the gallows.

And it was recorded in the book of the Chronicles in the presence of the king. Amen. And may God bless to us his word.

Well, to please turn back to Esther and the first two chapters that Willie read for us a little earlier. Esther, chapters 1 and 2. Now, one of the great cinematic experiences comes at the beginning of every Star Wars film.

You're sat in the dark. The familiar music composed by John Williams starts. And then you get the text scrolling up from the screen. A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away.

[11 : 05] I can see all the Star Wars buffs listening up at this moment. And then you get this little summary, don't you, of some of the key people and places which tee up the story that's about to begin.

And so by the time the text has finished scrolling across the screen, you know that you're in the middle of a conflict. And you know a bit about the history. You know where you are in the story as the action begins.

And these opening chapters of Esther serve a similar function. The plot doesn't really get going until chapter 3. And so these opening chapters, they introduce us to the key characters.

They set the scene for us. And they set the scene for an astonishing drama that is about to unfold in the rest of the book. And we learn a great deal about the situation of God's people living in a foreign land.

And much like your standard Star Wars film, we are, in the book of Esther, thrown into the midst of a great conflict. It is yet another episode in an age-old battle that has raged down through the generations.

[12 : 20] It is the outworking of the Lord's promise in Daniel chapter 9 that to the end there shall be war. And it is a war that has waged since the very opening pages of the Bible.

A battle between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. It is a cosmic battle that bursts onto the stage of human history from time to time.

And the book of Esther is just one more manifestation of that great battle between the eternal God and the great enemy, Satan himself.

The book of Esther, it traces the story of how a very weak-looking people living in exile in a powerful and vast Persian empire, how they escape what seems to be certain annihilation.

It's an astonishing story, great drama. But it's more than just a record of rescue. It's not just deliverance from certain death, but it's a story of restoration.

[13 : 31] A total reversal of fortunes for God's people and for a number of key individuals in the story. Just see where Mordecai begins in the story and where he ends up.

Look at Haman next week, where he begins and where he ends up. Great reversal. Complete turning around. It's a gripping story. Read it when you get home. It's full of tension.

Full of drama. It's a page-turner. But it's not just an interesting story about what happened in an empire far, far away. The New Testament consistently encourages Christians, God's people today, to make the stories of God's city with Israel, God's people then, part of our story.

The Apostle Paul says, doesn't he, in Romans 15, writing to the New Testament church, that whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope.

So this story, the story of Esther, it is also our story. And Esther is a great story for our times. At the heart of the book, as we've seen, is a conflict.

[14 : 52] It's a conflict between two communities, between two empires. The very powerful-looking empire of Persia, and the rather weak-looking empire of God, the Jewish people.

Here we read about God's people living in exile, strangers in a foreign land, and under a powerful, godless king. We don't have to think too hard, do we, about the predicament of being a small Christian minority in a powerful world that wants very little to do with God, and wants to push the Christian faith to the margins.

Just a mile up the road, in our Bath Street location, our Iranian brothers and sisters are finishing their gathering. Many of them know all too well what it is to live in fear of their lives, because they were Christians living under a hostile empire.

But perhaps in your own experience, you felt that weakness in the face of a very powerful-looking world around. Just think of the state-sponsored advertising that's being splashed around Scotland at the moment.

Have you seen those posters? Dear transphobe, dear homophobe. It's intimidating, isn't it? Someone I was chatting with said that these posters remind him of one of the Star Trek series where there is a particularly nasty opponent of the Federation, and they're called the Borg.

[16 : 27] And they get operated by incorporating their enemies into their collective. And their slogan was this, resistance is futile. You must be assimilated.

They may as well put that at the bottom of those posters, mightn't they? Resistance is futile. You must be assimilated. And there is great temptation, isn't there, for us in the face of the empire of the world around us.

There's great temptation to assimilate or simply just to despair. And so we need the book of Esther.

We need it to show us, we need it, so that we'll be instructed, so that we'll have hope, so that we'll endure and receive the encouragement of these scriptures.

So let's look more closely then at these opening two chapters which introduce us to the key people. They introduce us to the situation of God's people then. And it is a tale of two empires.

[17 : 31] The visible empire of the world and the hidden empire of God. So first then, chapter one. The visible empire of the world.

Seemingly powerful, yet ultimately laughable. So we're being shown here the visible impressiveness of the Persian empire.

Yet beneath the surface, it is vulnerable. It's not quite as strong as it first appears. In fact, we're invited to laugh at the visible empire. Look at the first nine verses which paint a picture of immense power.

Vast power. We find ourselves here in the middle of the Persian empire in Susa, the capital. The king is Ahasuerus who reigned from 485 to 465 BC.

And he is an incredibly powerful man. His kingdom stretches over 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia.

[18 : 35] If you were to sketch out his empire on a modern day map, it would take in the following countries. North, western India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Iran, Iraq, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, Turkey, northern Greece, Egypt, Libya, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and northern Sudan.

That is a massive empire. That was most of the known world. It's a vast empire. Inescapable. And Ahasuerus, the king, we read there in verse 3, he throws the party to end all parties.

Anyone who is anyone is there. And at last, for six months, astonishing wealth, astonishing power. And the reason for the party, if you were to read second historians from the time, the reason for the party is the gaining of loyalty from key leaders from across the empire before Ahasuerus wages war against the Greeks a few years later.

And it's a battle that he loses. So here he is, gathering all the key people, buying their loyalty for the war he's about to fight. And the writer here is painting a picture for us, showing us what it would have been like at the time.

Great strength, great power and wealth is on display as the king throws this huge party. And then, verse 5, he throws another party.

[20 : 13] This is the week-long after-party for all the people present in Susa, the citadel, both great and small. Now, the citadel was distinct from the wider city.

The citadel was the seat of government. It was the palace. It was the white hall of the empire. And this is where all the key civil servants would be, where the Ministry of Defence was based.

And no doubt, all those in the citadel have been working jolly hard the previous six months in the duration of that big party. Think about all the backroom deals going on, all the negotiations, all the diplomatic work that had to be carried out.

And so the king throws the after-party for their benefit. He thanks them for their loyalty with this lavish party. And note all the extraordinary detail.

The decor, the expensive materials, the goblets of gold, the wine that flowed. This is a mightily powerful king. A powerful empire which offers the best of the world's luxuries to those who are loyal.

[21 : 24] It's so attractive, isn't it? So alluring. All this power and wealth and luxury. This was the world. This was the world empire that God's people lived in.

This is the context in which the drama unfolds. And grand displays of power are not limited to Persia in the 5th century BC, are they?

Every empire since, every superpower today flaunts its power, flexes its muscles. And it can seem intimidating at times, can't it?

Great pressure to assimilate, to go with the flow. That is the world of God's people then. It's the world God's people find themselves in today so often.

But look on to verses 10 and 11. Yes, the king is very powerful, but he's also a bit of a loose cannon. We're introduced to Queen Vashti in verse 9, who's hosting a separate party for the women.

[22 : 32] And in verse 10, the king, after seven days of hard partying, is at last merry with wine. He's probably a hardened drinker, isn't he? And in this state of inebriation, he dispatches the eunuchs, all seven of them, to bring Queen Vashti in order to show her off.

For, it says, she was lovely to look at. And note again this real focus on the superficial, the outward appearance. That is how things worked in the empire of the world.

And the king, although powerful, he is a dangerous, vain man. As one commentator put it, the Persian court is not a safe place because the king held great power and he wielded it unpredictably, making decisions from dubious motives with impaired judgments.

The Greek historian Herodotus said of Ahasuerus that he was occasionally sagacious and principled, but more often an arbitrary, tyrannical and brutal despot.

Not a guy to mess with. Not characteristics you would want invested in the most powerful man over the biggest empire the world's ever seen. But this was the empire that God's people were living in.

[23 : 52] And the writers giving us a flavor of what it was like to be there. A world in which the reins of power were held in the hands of an incompetent and they were at best immoral and at the worst immoral.

And that is so often the situation God's people find themselves living in. We find ourselves living under rulers in whom a lot of power rests but perhaps without the wisdom that needs to accompany it.

And worse, for many Christians through history their very existence has been under threat from the ones who are meant to protect them. Well that was the situation then.

A very powerful man prone to drunkenness, prone to rash decisions, unwise decisions. But as we see in the second half of the chapter we're invited to laugh at Ahasuerus.

and to see that things are not perhaps as impressive and powerful as they might seem at first. Look on to verse 12 and following. The great king who governs almost all the known worlds, the king who has thrown the most lavish party in the history of the world at great expense, he summons his wife.

[25 : 17] And she said no. Look at verse 12. It's brilliant. She refuses to come. So here's the king. He can command his army but not his wife.

And it shows us, doesn't it, the limits of human power. The empire of the world has great power but it cannot bend a human will. And so the king responds with the most marvelous overreaction.

It's brilliant, isn't it? His anger burns, he summons all the legal experts and the situation quickly snowballs. the entire social fabric of the Persian empire is deemed to be under threat.

Look at verse 17. The queen's behavior will be made known to all women causing them to look at their husbands with contempt. And so legislation is rapidly drawn up, it's translated into all the language of the empire and then it's sent to every corner of the empire.

And in doing so, the king makes sure that everyone will hear about the queen's refusal. It's brilliant. Hazoros is made to look absolutely ridiculous, isn't he?

[26 : 32] You can imagine the wry smiles around the empire as this comes out. Vashti says no. The scandal, the shame. It's wonderful satire and the writer wants us to see the mask that looks so impressed he wants us to see that mask slipping.

He wants us to see behind the shows of power and to see what's really there. As one writer put it, it's easy to be dazzled by the empire's ostentatious show but it is empty of real power at its center.

The empire of the world is a glittering hologram that has no real substance. And so, to defend ourselves against being assimilated, we must learn to laugh at the empire.

And that's what we're encouraged to do here with this ridiculous situation with Queen Vashti. The empire and the emperor himself as we learn here in chapter one. Despite all the wealth and power, it may be that he really has no clothes.

Even the most powerful of this world's rulers and nations and special interest groups and lobbies, they are nothing in the face of the almighty God, the true emperor of the eternal empire.

[28 : 03] What do we read in Psalm 2, the psalm we sung earlier? The kings of the earth set themselves against the Lord and against his anointed saying, let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.

He who sits in the heavens laughs. The Lord holds them in derision. The empires of this world are not as powerful as they might seem.

It's a bit like my little boy trying to take me down in a wrestling match. No matter how much he tries, no matter how fierce he tries to be, he's got no chance.

It's laughable. And so S to one, it encourages us to laugh at the empire of this world as it seeks to flex its muscles. The truth is, the muscles aren't really that strong.

Ahasuerus, for all his pomp and ceremony, he couldn't even command his own wife. It's laughable. But let's look on to the second chapter.

[29 : 17] These opening chapters are a tale of two empires and we've seen the very visible empire of the world in chapter one, seemingly powerful. yet ultimately laughable.

But now in chapter two, we see the hidden empire of God, seemingly weak, seemingly vulnerable. And the chapter begins where chapter one left off.

After the king's anger abates, perhaps he's sobered up and he remembers that he's banished his wife. He remembers Vashti. And this presents a problem.

He now needs a new queen. And so the king's young men come up with a plan and they know he's going to give them the green light. They propose a Miss Persia contest.

Although, to be honest, that's the rather polite and PG-rated title you might give to this proposed competition. It's not so much a beauty competition than a performance in the bedroom competition.

[30 : 22] the most beautiful virgins in the nation from across the whole empire are to be gathered to Susa and they will in turn have a night with the king.

And the one who pleases the king the most, well, she'll become the queen. And this meant in our minds the nature of the Persian empire and of the king in particular.

It's a cruel empire where citizens can be rounded up for the sex competition at the whim of a tyrannical king. Shocking, isn't it, when you see what's really going on?

But up until this point you might well wonder what on earth is this book doing in our Bibles?

There is no mention of God up to this point. In fact, there's no mention of God at all in the whole book. There's no mention up to this point of God's people. Nothing. Nothing to tie this story to the wider story of the Bible.

[31 : 26] Is this here by mistake? Is it just a fun little story about this rather pompous king? Well, verse 5 it makes the connection. Look down there at chapter 2, verse 5.

We now begin to see why this is in our Bibles. Verse 5. Now there was a Jew in Susa the citadel whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jeah, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjamite.

So we're introduced to Mordecai, a key figure in all that is about to unfold in the coming chapters. Mordecai, a Jew, a descendant of King Saul, the significance of which we'll see in particular next week.

And one who, verse 6, had been carried away from Jerusalem among the captives, carried away with Jeconiah, the king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had carried away.

Mordecai, a Jew, an exile from Jerusalem. And that word exile, it crops up four times there in verse 6.

[32 : 37] He was an exile, exile, exile. And this is the situation that underlines the rest of the book. This is a book about the people of God, the Jews, living in exile under a foreign king.

the Jews who belonged ultimately to the empire of God, but now found themselves living under the empire of Ahasuerus.

And on the surface, things do not look promising, do they? God's people then, the Jews, they seem powerless, weak, without much prospect of anything.

And in fact, as we'll see as the story progresses, what unfolds isn't just about a conflict between two hostile peoples. Rather, it's about the hostility of the world against the Jews, against God's people.

And this is much like the situation God's people find themselves in every age, even today. We, as God's people, we belong to his empire, to his kingdom, but we're not yet living, are we, in the promised land?

[33 : 49] We find ourselves in and amongst the empire of this world. And there is real hostility. The Apostle Peter describes Christians in his first letter as elect exiles.

That is, those who are living in a foreign land, those who are not yet home. And that is how it is for God's people. It was then, these Jews living in exile in the Persian Empire, was then and remains so today.

We are not yet home. And so here's Mordecai. He's likely a civil servant working in the citadel, and he has responsibility for a young woman who will play a central role in all that follows.

Esther, plucked from obscurity, she soon finds herself elevated to the queen of Persia. She was taken, look there in verse 8, she was taken as part of this empire-wide search for the new queen.

And he enters into the care of Hegai and she quickly does well. She moves to the best place in the harem, all the while keeping her real identity as a Jew hidden.

[35 : 05] Mordecai has instructed her to keep it quiet. Now, the narrator makes no comment, good or bad, as to that decision to not declare her people.

But it certainly does tell us that for her to do so, for her to declare her nationality, for Esther to reveal her Jewish identity, it would have been potentially dangerous.

And it's also setting the scene for all that is to follow. You see, in the book of Esther, whose people you identify with, which empire you side with, that is going to be very significant indeed.

A choice will have to be made. And Esther will, as the story unfolds, have to decide which empire she really belongs to.

So she keeps it quiet. There's danger in the air. Mordecai checks on on Esther every single day, eager to see how she's getting on. And at last, her turn comes.

[36 : 11] Look down at verse 15. And notice the time marker there in verse 16. For some four years have passed since the beginning of chapter 1.

A slow build-up. How will Esther do? And unbeknown to her, Esther, there is a huge amount riding on this encounter.

As we'll see, the salvation of the people of God as the story unfolds is at stake. And Esther, well, she does well. She is the victor in this game of sex.

Verse 17. The king loved Esther more than all the women. He sets the royal crown on her head.

Now again, the narrator makes no evaluation of her actions. The application for us is not be an Esther. I can't imagine my own daughter encouraging her to take a similar approach ten years down the time.

[37 : 19] Can you? You'd be great on Love Island. The application is not what would Esther do. That's not the point. But what is clear in the biggest sweep of the story is that the Lord's invisible hand is very much at work.

He is bringing his people to the right place at the right time in order to bring salvation for his people. Esther, an undercover Jew, is brought from obscurity to the throne of the king.

Or more precisely, to the bed of the king. She is perfectly placed for what is to come. But this episode also offers great encouragement and comfort when we find ourselves in situations where every choice, every option, is an odd mix of right and wrong.

Esther found herself in the midst of the Persian Love Island competition and she won. And she wasn't there by choice. She was taken. And no doubt, she looked back on some of those things that happened with regret and sadness.

But God is so gracious, so sovereign, that he is able to use even events like these for his own purposes. And so we can trust him in the midst of life's mess, in the midst of our mess, we can trust that God is sovereign.

[38 : 49] He is working out his purposes. No doubt, Esther was wondering what on earth is going on. But as we read the story, with hindsight, we see exactly what God was doing.

But it's not just Esther. Mordecai, in the last section here, verses 19 to the end, he is also perfectly placed. And hearing about a secret plot against the king, he's able to get the message to the king via Esther.

And significantly, his name is recorded in the book of the Chronicles in the presence of the king. Mordecai, he saves the king's life. It's written down on the records.

And as we'll see later in the story, that is absolutely crucial. That is a turning point later on in the book. And so, the stage is now set for the story that is about to explode at the start of chapter 3.

The world that the exiled Jews find themselves in seems, on the face of it, very powerful, very impressive, frightening even. But we're given reason to chuckle.

[40 : 06] These chapters are dripping with satire. We're invited to laugh at the so-called king of the Persian Empire. And not only that, key people through God's invisible providence have found themselves in key positions and will find themselves against all the odds used for God's saving purposes.

This is how God works. He works through the weak things of this world. God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the strong.

God chose what is low and despised in the world. A carpenter from Nazareth put to death by the mighty Roman Empire.

But all was not as it seemed on the surface. That is how God works salvation. That is how it was for the Lord Jesus Christ.

that is how it is for all who are His. God works through the weak to bring about His purposes. So in the face of the empire of this world, don't assimilate.

[41 : 23] Don't fear. But rather laugh. Laugh and know that there is a hidden empire. one that will not fail.

One that will go on forever. Because we as His people belong to that empire. Let's pray.

Amen. Our Father God, we thank You for Your Word which brings us encouragement.

It brings us hope. So Lord, help us to live with the eyes of faith that we would be those who live not by sight.

That we wouldn't focus on the visible world. But Lord, trust Your eternal promises to trust that You will bring about to completion all that You promised and that we will live forever in Your wonderful, glorious empire with You as our perfect King.

[42 : 43] So help us Lord to trust You we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.