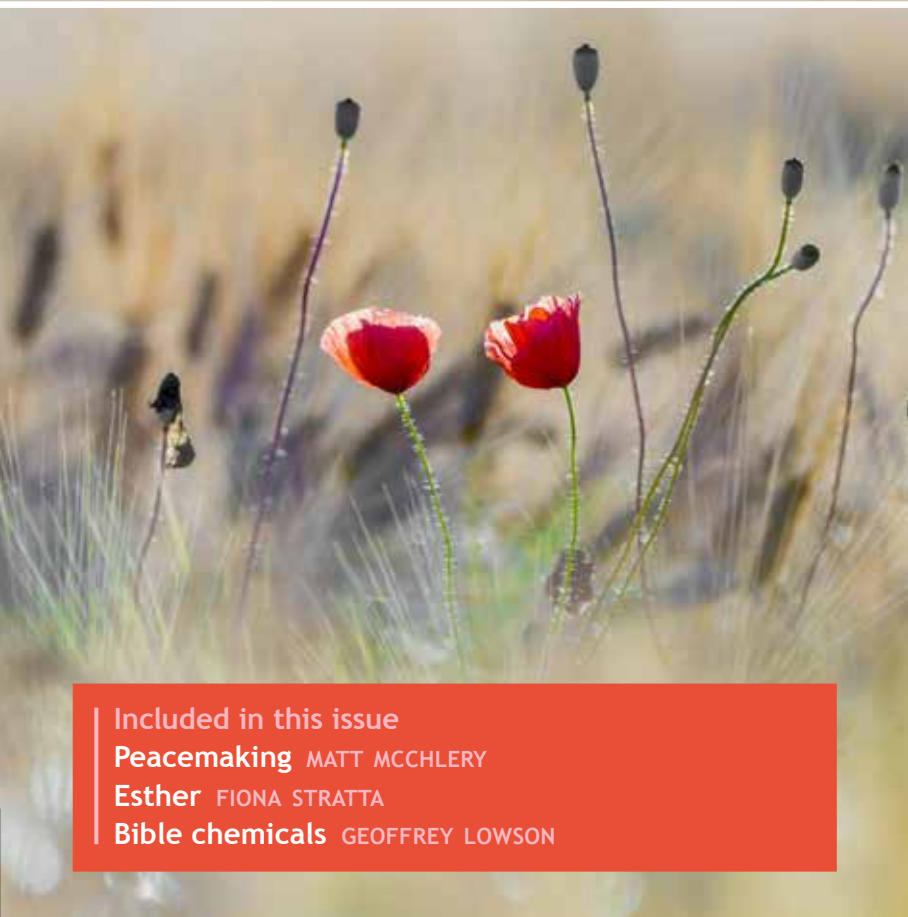


MAY-AUGUST 2025



New Daylight

Sustaining your daily journey with the Bible



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Esther FIONA STRATTA

Bible chemicals GEOFFREY LOWSON

New Daylight

Edited by **Gordon Giles**

May–August 2025

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BRF Ministries

15 The Chambers, Vineyard,
Abingdon OX14 3FE
+44 (0)1865 319700 | brf.org.uk

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Suggestions for using *New Daylight*

Find a regular time and place, if possible, where you can read and pray undisturbed. Before you begin, take time to be still and perhaps use the prayer of BRF Ministries on page 6. Then read the Bible passage slowly (try reading it aloud if you find it over-familiar), followed by the comment. You can also use *New Daylight* for group study and discussion, if you prefer.

The prayer or point for reflection can be a starting point for your own meditation and prayer. Many people like to keep a journal to record their thoughts about a Bible passage and items for prayer. In *New Daylight* we also note the Sundays and some special festivals from the church calendar, to keep in step with the Christian year.

New Daylight and the Bible

New Daylight contributors use a range of Bible versions, and you will find a list of the versions used opposite. You are welcome to use your own preferred version alongside the passage printed in the notes. This can be particularly helpful if the Bible text has been abridged.

New Daylight affirms that the whole of the Bible is God's revelation to us, and we should read, reflect on and learn from every part of both Old and New Testaments. Usually the printed comment presents a straightforward 'thought for the day', but sometimes it may also raise questions rather than simply providing answers, as we wrestle with some of the more difficult passages of scripture.

New Daylight is also available in a deluxe edition (larger format). Visit your local Christian bookshop or BRF's online shop brfonline.org.uk. To obtain an audio version for the blind or partially sighted, contact Torch Trust for the Blind, Torch House, Torch Way, Northampton Road, Market Harborough LE16 9HL; +44 (0)1858 438260; info@torchtrust.org.

Comment on *New Daylight*

To send feedback, please email enquiries@brf.org.uk, phone +44 (0)1865 319700 or write to the address shown opposite.

Writers in this issue

Liz Hoare works part-time at the St Bede's Pastoral Centre in York, which offers spiritual accompaniment, training and quiet days. Liz has written two books – *Using the Bible in Spiritual Direction* and *Twelve Great Women Writers* – and is currently working on a book about contentment.

Martin Leckebusch worked in IT for 37 years before retiring to spend more time writing. He lives in Gloucester, is an elder at a Baptist church and is the author of over 500 published hymn texts.

Geoffrey Lawson is a retired priest living in a small village in the west of County Durham. In addition to parochial ministry, he spent 21 years working for the mission agency USPG.

Matt McChlery is an author, songwriter and overseer (elder) of his local church. He has written four books, the most recent being *The Prison Letters: A 40 day devotional for Lent*. He is also host of the 'Christian Book Blurb' podcast, which aims to help listeners in their discipleship one book at a time.

Michael Mitton is a freelance writer, speaker and spiritual director. He is also a canon emeritus of Derby Cathedral. His books include *The Poetry of Pilgrimage* and *Restoring the Woven Cord*, both published by BRF Ministries.

Roland Riem is vice dean of Winchester Cathedral. He is involved in the greening of the cathedral and the development of its interpretation for visitors. In previous roles Roland was involved in university chaplaincy and theological education.

Margaret Silf is an ecumenical Christian committed to working across and beyond traditional divisions. She is the author of a number of books for 21st-century spiritual pilgrims and a retreat facilitator.

Naomi Starkey is vicar (ministry area leader) of Bro Eryri, six worshipping communities in the shadow of Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon) in north Wales.

Fiona Stratta worked as a speech and language therapist and now works as a tutor and speech and drama teacher. She is author of *Walking with Gospel Women* and *Walking with Biblical Women of Courage*, both published by BRF.

Gordon Giles writes...



In this summer's edition of *New Daylight* we have a few sets of thematic reflections alongside our usual extracts from biblical books. Psalms, gospel and Old Testament passages are interspersed with the themes of chemistry, numbers and peacemaking as well as an encounter with Barnabas.

Consequently there is one short passage that occurs twice in this edition. Appearing as part of two sets of readings drawn from across the Bible, our authors' reflections on it are very different. I wonder if you can spot it!

It goes to show how deep, how wide, how broad and how universal is the word of God. So much can be extrapolated from a brief passage of scripture. This is the nature and purpose of *New Daylight*, that just a few lines can feed us for the day. Our authors have been serving us biblical morsels for many years now, and the recipe still satisfies our hunger for the word and grace of God. While the Bible is inexhaustible, it does, after all, only have 66 books, and so we often find ourselves encountering familiar books or texts if we read for many years, as many readers do and have done. Yet the gift of God's word to us is the gift that keeps giving, often in new and creative ways. Sometimes putting passages from different parts of the Bible together thematically can yield fresh insights, while a continuous read-through is a good discipline too.

While God's word is unchanging, and Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow, we are not. Life happens, and it changes us. The living, the loving, the losing and the leaving behind affect us and change us, as do world events. When we read a passage of scripture, it is the same as when we last read it, but we and the world are not. Therefore, we might read it differently and God speaks to us through it in new ways. This can be enlightening or painful. When we engage our minds and spirits with scripture in new ways we expose our inner selves to the Spirit of God, speaking through the Bible, and this is a form of vulnerable submission to Christ. Yet in doing so, by his grace we open ourselves to challenge, comfort, enlightenment and blessing.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gordon".

The prayer of BRF Ministries

*Faithful God,
thank you for growing BRF
from small beginnings
into the worldwide family of BRF Ministries.
We rejoice as young and old
discover you through your word
and grow daily in faith and love.
Keep us humble in your service,
ambitious for your glory
and open to new opportunities.
For your name's sake,
Amen.*

'It is such a joy to be part of this amazing project'

As part of our Living Faith ministry, we're raising funds to give away copies of Bible reading notes and other resources to those who aren't able to access them any other way, working with food banks and chaplaincy services, in prisons, hospitals and care homes.

'This very generous gift will be hugely appreciated, and truly bless each recipient... Bless you for your kindness.'

'We would like to send our enormous thanks to all involved. Your generosity will have a significant impact and will help us to continue to provide support to local people in crisis, and for this we cannot thank you enough.'

If you've enjoyed and benefited from our resources, would you consider paying it forward to enable others to do so too?

Make a gift at brf.org.uk/donate

Esther



I first heard Esther's story as a child in nightly instalments, told by my grandfather, who was a master storyteller. Now I cannot fathom how he succeeded in making such a dark story accessible to children, but such was his gift. Here we have a narrative that tells of slavery, oppression, harems and indulgent leadership. There is an evil villain, Haman, who plots mass genocide, while the protagonists, Esther and Mordecai, act with wisdom, integrity, courage and self-sacrifice. We read of wrongs being righted, justice being done, the salvation of God's people, celebration and longed-for security. In spite of the darkness, at each step of the narrative God appears to be working his purposes out with ever-increasing involvement, although of course he is always active, even at the times when he seems hidden or does not get named.

We do not know who wrote the book of Esther, although possible authors have been proposed, one being the hero himself, Mordecai. Without mentioning God, his covenant with his people or prayer, the author wants to demonstrate that there is a God in heaven who has ultimate control, working actively in the lives of his people. At the same time the writer shows the importance of human responsibility in shaping events. This is the mystery of the interaction between God's sovereignty and human will. God chooses to work through those who are committed to his purposes.

The book of Esther is important to us because it is part of *our* story. God's plan for humanity depended on the survival of the Judahites, for the Messiah was to come from the line of Judah. God promised Abraham (Judah's great-grandfather) that all people, us included, will be blessed through him. By faith in Jesus Christ, we, the church, have been 'grafted' on to 'Abraham's tree' (Romans 11).

Over the next fortnight we delve into a book that challenges us to godly transformation in response to our circumstances, to a renewal in our thinking and to a willingness to take action. We are encouraged to trust God who, even when he appears absent, is working all things together for good.

May we confidently say with Job, 'I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted' (Job 42:2, NRSV).

Vashti's protest

On the seventh day of the feast, when King Xerxes was in high spirits because of the wine, he told the seven eunuchs who attended him... to bring Queen Vashti to him with the royal crown on her head. He wanted the nobles and all the other men to gaze on her beauty, for she was a very beautiful woman. But when they conveyed the king's order to Queen Vashti, she refused to come. This made the king furious, and he burned with anger.

It is 483BC and Xerxes, ruler of the Persian empire, is giving a final banquet for his nobles, officials and military leaders after six months of planning a war against Greece. His bubble of pride and joviality is burst when Queen Vashti refuses to be paraded in front of his guests. How is he to react? If he cannot control outcomes within the palace, how can he control outcomes across his empire? We can only imagine Vashti's reasons for this seemingly small act of defiance, but it is seen by the king's advisors as a threat to the stability of their patriarchal society. Vashti pays the high price of banishment.

Many since have acted in defiance of an order untenable to them. For some, this has led to a loss of a position and status (as for Vashti); for others it has culminated in martyrdom. However, in some cases the small protest has been the beginning of a major change in the course of history. The civil rights movement in the USA was initiated by Rosa Park's refusal to give up her seat on a bus to a white man. Worldwide, both the abolition of slavery and the suffrage movements grew from small beginnings as individuals courageously and tenaciously fought for equality.

As followers of Christ, we need to be prepared for opportunities for godly protest that come our way, when we can show in word or action that 'there is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28).

Thank you, Lord, that you have told us what it is that you require from us: to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with you (Micah 6:8). Amen.

Mordecai's commitment

At that time there was a Jewish man in the fortress of Susa whose name was Mordecai son of Jair. He was from the tribe of Benjamin... His family had been among those who, with King Jehoiachin of Judah, had been exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. This man had a very beautiful and lovely young cousin, Hadassah, who was also called Esther. When her father and mother died, Mordecai adopted her into his family and raised her as his own daughter.

Mordecai's family were exiled a hundred years previously, and about 50 years later Zerubbabel took the first group of exiles back to Jerusalem. Yet some Judahites have chosen to stay within the security of Persia, where under Cyrus the Great (the first Persian emperor) they have been allowed to start businesses, take positions in the government and practise their faith. Mordecai works in an administrative role in Xerxes' winter palace in Susa. We learn immediately that he is a man of integrity, faithfulness and compassion, capable of the self-sacrifice needed to bring up his relatives' orphaned child. Mordecai goes far beyond the call of duty by raising her lovingly as a daughter.

During World War II, homes across Britain welcomed Jewish refugees and children evacuated from the cities. For some, this initial compulsion to help grew into a Mordecai-like loving commitment. Those who cared for my father-in-law as an evacuee child would have willingly adopted him at the end of the war. However, in the years they devotedly looked after him while living out their Christian faith, they passed on to him a lasting legacy as they planted seeds of trust in Jesus Christ. They gave him an example of what it is to have confidence in God, just as Mordecai did for Esther so long ago.

We may not have the inner or outer resources, or the opportunity, to open our homes in big gestures of compassion. However, as we walk with Jesus, small gestures of compassion can encourage others and perhaps be life-changing for them. The ripple effect may be beyond our imagining.

Lord, through your power at work within us, may you accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think (Ephesians 3:20). Amen.

FIONA STRATTA

Hegai's favourite

As a result of the king's decree, Esther, along with many other young women, was brought to the king's harem at the fortress of Susa and placed in Hegai's care. Hegai was very impressed with Esther and treated her kindly. He quickly ordered a special menu for her and provided her with beauty treatments. He also assigned her seven maids specially chosen for the king's palace, and he moved her and her maids into the best place in the harem... When it was Esther's turn to go to the king, she accepted the advice of Hegai, the eunuch in charge of the harem. She asked for nothing except what he suggested, and she was admired by everyone who saw her.

Esther is likely to have been a teenager when she is forced to leave the loving security she has known to enter the harem. Her vulnerability is abused when she is forcefully recruited for sexual exploitation, an evil that tragically continues to this day. Her terror and trauma must have been immense. Yet she behaves in such a way that it is more than her beauty which impresses Hegai, gaining his favour. In spite of being powerless to escape her situation, we get a sense of Esther's poise and courage as she listens, learns and takes Hegai's advice in the year before she is sent to the king.

External events are outside of Esther's influence, as are the thoughts, feelings, beliefs and behaviour of others. Yet, even in difficult circumstances, she takes responsibility for the one thing she can control: her reaction, both to her situation and to the people around her. Like Esther, by identifying what we can and cannot influence, we are then in a position to work on our attitudes and behaviour. We have the presence of the Holy Spirit as we do this, drawing alongside us to guide and counsel.

Although the enslaved Esther finds favour (and the eventual climax of the narrative is freedom for God's people), the abuse of human rights should never be condoned. Through prayer, support and action we need to fight against injustice and abuse in all its forms, whether close to home or far away.

*Thank you, Lord, that your hand sustains and your arm strengthens us
(Psalm 89:21). Amen.*

Wisdom and hope

Esther had not told anyone of her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had directed her not to do so. Every day Mordecai would take a walk near the courtyard of the harem to find out about Esther and what was happening to her... Even after all the young women had been transferred to the second harem and Mordecai had become a palace official, Esther continued to keep her family background and nationality a secret. She was still following Mordecai's directions, just as she did when she lived in his home.

Mordecai shows his commitment to supporting Esther by daily enquiries after her well-being. His counsel that she should keep her nationality a secret indicates that, despite the relative religious freedom the Judahites are granted in Persia, there is enough of a threat to warrant silence. When Esther becomes the king's favourite and replaces Vashti as queen, Mordecai's warning keeps her grounded and she continues to respect his astuteness. Esther's humility leads to a wisdom that is to benefit not only her, but all God's people.

At this point in the story, Mordecai uses his position as Esther's mentor and father figure to advise and protect her. We can imagine his sorrow as he follows Esther's progress through that first year and then her placement in the second harem, where Esther is sent after her night with the king. Mentoring and parenting are costly privileges, ones that drive us to a deeper dependence on the Lord, the source of wisdom and hope.

The writer of Ecclesiastes tells us that there is 'a time to be silent and a time to speak' (3:7), as the story of Esther shows so clearly. For Esther, surrounded by other young women, the pull to tell her story must have been strong. However, she shows restraint, being quick to listen, yet slow to speak. In practice, it can be challenging for us to know when to be silent and when to speak, yet God promises us generous amounts of wisdom when we ask for it.

Lord, thank you for your promise of wisdom which, like honey, is of great benefit to us. May we be wise, hope-filled people, whose carefully chosen words are sweet and healing (Proverbs 16:24; 24:14). Amen.

FIONA STRATTA

The right place at the right time

One day as Mordecai was on duty at the king's gate, two of the king's eunuchs, Bigthana and Teresh – who were guards at the door of the king's private quarters – became angry at King Xerxes and plotted to assassinate him. But Mordecai heard about the plot and gave the information to Queen Esther. She then told the king about it and gave Mordecai credit for the report... This was all recorded in *The Book of the History of King Xerxes' Reign*.

As the story develops we have an increasing awareness of God being at work 'behind the scenes'. This has already been hinted at, such as in the way Esther won Hegai's favour, leading to blessings in her dark situation. Mordecai, the right person, happens to be in exactly the right place at the right time to save the king's life. He is the right person for the task because he will act wisely and with integrity. Although credit is given to Mordecai in the narrative, there is no immediate reward.

Like Mordecai, much of our daily lives may seem to go by with a quiet mindfulness of God's presence. There are, however, moments when we know that we have been at exactly the right place at the right time. What seemed like a coincidence is actually a 'God-incidence'. Journalling such moments can encourage us in our faith journey. It is all too easy to forget.

Mordecai is God's person for the job, not only because he can be trusted to take action, but also because he can be entrusted with being overlooked. At this point there is no accolade; work continues as usual. No doubt we share the experience of having been overlooked, whether in secular work, Christian service or in the giving of sacrificial love which has not been recognised or affirmed. First, we can take comfort from the fact that God sees and delights in us. Second, we can choose to reject bitterness and ask the Holy Spirit to use the experience to transform us into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Lord, change us as we fix our eyes on you, the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). May we be ready for God-incidences and prepared to be overlooked. Amen.

Haman's anger

Some time later King Xerxes promoted Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite over all the other nobles, making him the most powerful official in the empire. All the king's officials would bow down before Haman to show him respect whenever he passed by, for so the king had commanded. But Mordecai refused to bow down or show him respect... Haman... was filled with rage. He had learned of Mordecai's nationality, so he decided it was not enough to lay hands on Mordecai alone. Instead, he looked for a way to destroy all the Jews throughout the entire empire of Xerxes.

Xerxes makes an unwise choice in promoting Haman to be his right-hand man, for Haman, like the king, has a problem with anger management. Haman is enraged when Mordecai will not bow down to him. It provides him with an excuse to vent his hatred: he plans ethnic cleansing throughout the empire, the killing of all Judahites. In his sermon on the mount, Jesus teaches that wrong actions start with wrong heart attitudes, such as anger leading to hatred and murder. It is for good reason that we are warned in the Bible not to let the sun go down on our anger (Ephesians 4:26).

Why did Mordecai refuse to bow down to Haman? The narrative gives no explanation for Mordecai's refusal. Bowing down to someone in a superior position does not necessarily have to infer that Haman is being acknowledged as a deity, although perhaps Mordecai saw it as this and therefore refused. Their ancestry may also have played a part in Mordecai's decision, for Haman was a descendant of Agag, who was an Amalekite king. God's people and the Amalekites were always enemies. Mordecai did what he considered right and God-honouring at that moment in time.

Taking a stand for what we believe is right, whether through passive resistance or through action, is never a guarantee that all will go well from a human perspective. We are often unaware of the possible consequences. It is then we learn to trust in God's grace and sovereignty, believing that 'all manner of thing shall be well' (Julian of Norwich).

Lord, thank you that your goodness and mercy follows us all the days of our lives (Psalm 23:6). Amen.

Lament

So in the month of April... lots were cast in Haman's presence (the lots were called *purim*) to determine the best day and month to take action. And the day selected was March 7, nearly a year later... The king said, 'The money and the people are both yours to do with as you see fit'... When Mordecai learned about all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on burlap and ashes, and went out into the city, crying with a loud and bitter wail.

How terrible it must have been for Mordecai to learn of Haman's plans to annihilate the Judahites. Did he feel responsible? Although it is true that Mordecai's passive resistance preceded the ensuing events, Haman makes his wicked plan from a stance of hatred for God's people. He is responsible before God for his actions. The Lord sees what he does and examines the path he takes. Haman will bring about his own downfall; no one else is to blame. It is easy to lose sight of personal responsibility and to blame others or circumstances for our choices or behaviour.

Mordecai makes known his bitter grief. His desperation for his people is as public as his refusal to bow to Haman. The wearing of burlap (a coarse material) is a symbol of grief, remorse and repentance. The discomfort of the cloth is an outer sign of the discomfort of the soul. But such behaviour is not court etiquette, drawing further attention to Mordecai.

Are we afraid to show grief? On our screens, we see outpourings of lament in war-torn parts of the world where it is normal to display grief openly. We have much to learn from this in our more reserved societies, for how can we address what has never been expressed? Jesus, moved by compassion, shed tears publicly. The psalms can help us, for they are full of laments that enable us to shape our grief into words and prayers. They also give us a resource to weep with those who weep.

Lord, thank you that we can pour out our hearts to you, for you are our refuge (Psalm 62:8). God of comfort, may we know your comfort in sorrow and share this comfort with others (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). Amen.

New Daylight provides four months of daily Bible readings and comment, with a regular team of contributors drawn from a range of church backgrounds. It is ideal for anybody wanting an accessible yet stimulating aid to spending time with God each day, deepening their faith and their knowledge of scripture.

‘Thank you for all you do to make every issue so readable and enlightening, giving us the opportunity to get closer to God.’

‘Thank you to all the wonderful writers who bring scriptures to life and make them relevant for us in the here and now.’

‘I just wanted to say how much I appreciate the notes for helping to keep me going with reading the Bible and shedding light on demanding passages.’

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New Daylight is edited by Gordon Giles, Canon Chancellor of Rochester Cathedral.

In this issue

Michael Mitton
Naomi Starkey
Margaret Silf
Gordon Giles
Fiona Stratta

Matt McChlery
Roland Riem
Liz Hoare
Geoffrey Lowson
Martin Leckebusch

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