

Esther 7
September 12, 2021

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: As we have been going through our study of Esther, we have seen the beginning of the demise of Haman. I'm wondering what your thoughts are as to whether you think there is any hope for Haman spiritually. Is Haman out of God's reach? Right now, it's hard to see any hope for him. Most of us are probably thinking "he is getting what he deserves," especially for a plan to annihilate God's chosen people.

Transition: When Haman arrived at Esther's palace apartment, neither the king nor Haman knew that Esther was a Jewess. Haman was probably still distressed because of the events of the day where he honored Mordecai. Had he known the nationality of the queen, Haman either would have run for his life or fallen on his face and begged the king for mercy. God had warned Haman through circumstances, through his advisers, and through his wife; but Haman would not heed the warnings. Let's see how this story continues to unfold.

BOOK:

Haman Hanged

7 So the king and Haman went to dine with Queen Esther,² and as they were drinking wine on that second day, the king again asked, "Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted."

³ Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor with you, O king, and if it pleases your majesty, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request. ⁴ For I and my people have been sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king."

⁵ King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, "Who is he? Where is the man who has dared to do such a thing?"

⁶ Esther said, "The adversary and enemy is this vile Haman."

Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen. ⁷ The king got up in a rage, left his wine and went out into the palace garden. But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life.

⁸ Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining.

The king exclaimed, "Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?"

As soon as the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. ⁹ Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said, "A gallows seventy-five feet high stands by Haman's house. He had it made for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king."

The king said, "Hang him on it!" ¹⁰ So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's fury subsided.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Not only is there a personal lesson here, but there is also a lesson about the nation of Israel: *Every enemy that has ever tried to destroy Israel has been destroyed.* "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you" is God's promise to Israel (Gen. 12:3, NKJV), and He has always kept it. God takes His promises seriously even if the nations of the world ignore them or challenge them.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Be Committed* (pp. 136–144). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

When they arrived at Esther's palace apartment, neither the king nor Haman knew that Esther was a Jewess. Haman was probably still distressed because of the events of the day, but he composed himself and hoped to enjoy the banquet. This is the seventh banquet recorded in the Book of Esther.

Had he known the nationality of the queen, Haman either would have run for his life or fallen on his face and begged the king for mercy. God had warned Haman through circumstances, through his advisers, and through his wife; but the prime minister would not heed the warnings. "The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished" (Prov. 16:5, NIV).

God's long-suffering led Haman into thinking he was safe. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecc. 8:11, NKJV). God's long-suffering today is an opportunity for people to repent (2 Peter 3:9), but our sinful world thinks it means God won't judge sinners at all. "For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape" (1 Thes. 5:3, NKJV).

1. The queen's request (Es. 7:1–4)

Ever since the previous evening's banquet, Ahasuerus had been waiting to hear the queen's petition; so when the wine was served, he broached the subject. Of course, the statement "even to half of the kingdom" was a royal promise that wasn't to be taken literally (see 5:3; Dan. 5:16; Mark 6:23). It simply meant that the king would be generous. Therefore, tell him what you want.

During the previous twenty-four hours, Esther had probably rehearsed this speech many times; and now God gave her the strength to deliver it. Remember, she was taking her life in her hands, for if the king rejected her plea, that was the end.

She made it clear from the beginning that she depended on the favor of the king and wasn't trying to tell him what to do. She also said that her desire wasn't to please herself but to please the king. This was good psychology, especially when dealing with a chauvinistic monarch like Ahasuerus.

It was also wise on her part not to say, "There's a man in your kingdom who plans to destroy all of the Jews!" *She focused her petition on the fact that the queen's life was in danger and the king had to do something about it.* We have reason to believe Ahasuerus still loved his queen and didn't want any harm to come to her. As he sat there in her presence and beheld her beauty, her words moved him. What monster would want to kill the queen?

Not only was the queen's life in danger, but her people were also in danger of being slain. My guess is that this statement perplexed the king. Who were her people? Wasn't she a Persian? Has she been keeping a secret from me?

It was then that Esther reminded the king of the decree he had approved to wipe out the Jewish nation. In fact, her words are almost verbatim from the decree (Es. 3:13). Ahasuerus was smart enough to put two and two together and understand that Queen Esther was a Jewess, and he had unwittingly consented to her murder!

Esther continued by pointing out that the king had been paid to issue this decree (vv. 9–11). If he had sold the Jews as slaves, such a payment might have been just. But to sell them into death and total destruction was something for which nobody had enough money. "If it were only a matter of going into bondage," said Esther, "I would have kept quiet. Why bother the king with that? But wholesale murder is something I can't ignore."

Queen Esther bravely interceded for her people. How will the king respond? "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed. The Lord works out everything for His own ends—even the wicked for a day of disaster" (Prov. 16:3–4, NIV).

2. The king's rage (Es. 7:5–8)

At this point, try to imagine what was going through the mind of King Ahasuerus. Without openly accusing him, Esther has implicated the king in a horrible crime, and he was bound to feel guilty. The king knew that he had impetuously approved the decree. But he didn't realize that the decree was part of a conspiracy. He had signed the death warrant for his own wife! The king had to find a way to save his wife and save face at the same time.

In an absolute monarchy, the king is looked upon as a god and can do no wrong. This is why ancient monarchs always had a stable of scapegoats available—people who could take the blame for the ignorance or inefficiency of the throne. (Modern politicians often do the same thing.) Therefore, the king's question in verse 5 implied much more than, "Who is guilty?" The king was also looking for somebody to punish.

Ahasuerus had already received one surprise when he learned the nationality of his queen; and now he would be hit with another: His favorite officer was the adversary and enemy who had plotted the whole thing. Esther didn't reveal that Haman, like the king, had just learned from her own lips that she was a Jewess. Perhaps Ahasuerus concluded that Haman's crime was wanting to slay the queen and that he had decided to accomplish it by killing all the Jews. For that matter, maybe Haman was part of the Bigthan-Teresh conspiracy that Mordecai had exposed, a conspiracy to murder the king! (See 2:21–23.) *And like Esther, Mordecai was a Jew!*

Now we can better understand why God directed Esther to delay her pleas: He wanted to give Ahasuerus opportunity to learn what Mordecai had done, that Mordecai was a Jew and that he deserved to be honored. *If a Jew had saved the king's life, why should the king exterminate the Jews?*

"The king got up in a rage, left his wine and went out into the palace garden" (7:7, NIV). We've already noted that Ahasuerus was a man with a short temper (1:12); but on this occasion, his anger must have been volcanic. His masculine pride was hurt because he had misjudged the character of Haman. He had made a fool of himself by promoting Haman and by giving him so much influence. The king had also erred in approving the decree without first weighing all the facts (Prov. 18:13). As a result, he had endangered the lives of two very special Jews—Mordecai, who had saved his life, and Esther, his beloved wife.

No doubt the king walked to and fro in the garden, doing his best to control the anger that welled up within him. "The wrath of a king is as messengers of death" (Prov. 16:14, KJV). "The king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion" (19:12, KJV). No wonder Haman was afraid! He had been near enough to the king to recognize and interpret his every mood. He knew the king was about to become judge and jury and pass a sentence from which there was no escape.

But for Haman, there was one remote possibility: the mercy of the queen. Perhaps he could arouse her pity and get her to intercede for him. Esther knew Haman was a tool of the devil determined to destroy the Jewish people. Had he known originally that Esther was a Jewess, Haman might have cleverly worded the decree so that her life would be preserved; but he would still have had authority to annihilate all of her people. It was Haman's hatred for the queen's cousin Mordecai that started the whole conspiracy (Es. 3:5–6), and Esther wasn't about to abandon the one man who had meant so much to her.

In the Soncino Jewish commentary on Esther, Dr. S. Goldman makes this telling statement about 7:8: "The arrogant bully became, as usually in the face of disaster, a whining coward" (*The Five Megilloth*, p. 228). When the authority of the king had been behind him, Haman could courageously strut about, demand respect, and give orders. But now that the anger of the king was *against* him, Haman's true character was revealed. He was not a giant; he was only a midget full of pride and hot air! And all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Haman's life back together again.

What a paradox! Haman had been furious because a Jewish *man* wouldn't bow down to him, and now Haman was prostrate before a Jewish *woman*, begging for his life! When the king entered the room and saw the scene, he accused Haman of trying to molest the queen. In his anger, the king would have exaggerated anything Haman did; and besides that, molesting the queen was a capital crime. Forget about the conspiracy; everybody could see for themselves that Haman was guilty of attacking the queen. For that crime alone, he deserved to die.

After escorting Mordecai around the city, Haman had covered *his head* in humiliation (6:12); but now the king's guards covered Haman's *face* in preparation for his execution. Had Haman covered his head in true humility and repentance, things would have been different, but he

refused to listen to the warnings of the Lord. He was so controlled by pride and malice that he was blind to the dangers that laid ahead.

3. Haman's reward (Es. 7:9–10)

“The righteous is delivered from trouble, and it comes to the wicked instead” (Prov. 11:8, NKJV). The conspicuous gallows that Haman had constructed for Mordecai was convenient for the execution of Haman. Therefore, the king used it. Apparently, Haman had let it be known in the palace that he planned to kill Mordecai, for the king's servant knew the purpose of the gallows. In his pride, Haman had boasted too much; and his words came back not only to haunt him but also to help slay him.

The day before, Haman had led Mordecai through the streets dressed in royal splendor; but now Haman was led through the streets with a covering over his face and a gallows at the end of the journey. Certainly Haman's wife Zeresh and their ten sons witnessed the execution, as did many of the Jews in the city. It must have given courage to the Jews to know that their enemy Haman was no longer on the scene.

“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked,” warned Paul. “A man reaps what he sows” (Gal. 6:7, NIV). Haman sowed anger against Mordecai, and he reaped anger from the king. Haman wanted to kill Mordecai and the Jews, and the king killed Haman. “Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same” (Job 4:8, KJV). “He who sows wickedness reaps trouble” (Prov. 22:8, NIV).

This unchanging principle of sowing and reaping is illustrated throughout the Bible, *and it applies to both believers and unbelievers*. Jacob killed an animal and lied to his father, pretending to be Esau (Gen. 27:1–29); and years later Jacob's sons killed an animal and lied to him, pretending that Joseph was dead (37:31–35). Pharaoh gave orders to drown the Jewish baby boys (Ex. 1), and one day his army was drowned in the Red Sea (Ex. 14–15).

David secretly took his neighbor's wife and committed adultery (2 Sam. 11), and David's own son Absalom took his father's concubines and openly committed adultery with them (16:20–23). Furthermore, David's daughter Tamar was raped by her half brother Amnon (2 Sam. 13). David killed Bathsheba's husband (11:14–25), and three of David's own sons were slain: Absalom (2 Sam. 18), Amnon (13:23–36), and Adonijah (1 Kings 2:13–25). Saul of Tarsus encouraged the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1); and when he became Paul the missionary, he was stoned at Lystra (14:19–20).

But let's keep in mind that this law of sowing and reaping also applies to doing what is good and right. If we sow to the flesh, we reap corruption; but if we sow to the Spirit, we reap life everlasting (Gal. 6:8). No good deed done for the glory of Jesus Christ will ever be forgotten before God. No loving word spoken in Jesus' name will ever be wasted. If we don't see the harvest in this life, we'll see it when we stand before the Lord. Even a cup of cold water given in the name of Christ will have its just reward (Matt. 10:42; 25:31–46).

Haman was hanged, or impaled, on his own gallows, and his body taken down and buried. *All of Haman's wealth and glory couldn't rescue him from death nor could he take any of it with him*. “Those who trust in their wealth and boast in the multitude of their riches, none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him—for the redemption of their souls is costly ... Do not be afraid when one becomes rich, when the glory of his house is increased; for when he dies he shall carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him” (Ps. 49:6–8, 16–17, NKJV). In 1 Peter 1:18–19, Peter tells us how costly our redemption is: the shedding of the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Not only is there a personal lesson here, but there is also a lesson about the nation of Israel: *Every enemy that has ever tried to destroy Israel has been destroyed.* “I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you” is God’s promise to Israel (Gen. 12:3, NKJV), and He has always kept it. God takes His promises seriously even if the nations of the world ignore them or challenge them.

This doesn’t mean that God necessarily approves everything Israel has done or will do, but it does mean that God doesn’t approve of those who try to destroy His chosen people. Whether it’s Pharaoh in Egypt, Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon, Haman in Persia, or Hitler in Germany, the enemy of the Jews is the enemy of Almighty God and will not succeed.

“Then was the king’s wrath pacified” (Es. 7:10, KJV). The Hebrew word translated “pacified” is used in Genesis 8:1 to describe the receding waters of the Flood. The king’s anger had welled up within him and reached its peak when he executed Haman. Now it subsided, and the king was himself again. But though the adversary was out of the way, the problem was not completely solved; for the king’s decree was still in effect *and could not be changed*. It was now the third month (Es. 8:9), and there were nine months to go before the fateful day when the Jews could legally be slain (3:13).

How would Esther and Mordecai solve this problem?

That is the topic of the next chapter.

Martin, J. A. (1985). Nahum. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 710-712) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

5. XERXES TOLD OF PLOT, HAMAN HANGED (CHAP. 7)

7:1–4. What **Haman** knew about **Esther** is not stated. If he knew of the connection between Mordecai and Esther he may have been even more terrified at the prospect of attending this second banquet given by Esther. This was the fifth banquet mentioned in the Book of Esther: two were given by **the king** (1:3, 5), one by Queen Vashti (1:9), and two by **Queen Esther** (5:4, 8). During the banquet **the king** again asked Esther her **request**, and again he promised that he would grant it to her (cf. 5:3, 6). This time Esther got right to the point and gave her **petition** and **request ... life** for her and her **people**. It was now clear to Xerxes what her nationality was (cf. 2:10, 20). She explained that all her **people** had been **sold** (i.e., the king was offered a bribe by Haman; cf. 3:9; 4:7) into extinction (cf. 3:13). Showing her subservient position to the king, she added that if they had merely been **sold** into slavery she certainly would not have bothered **the king**. Esther’s statement not only shows the unbelievable power of the king, but also the condition to which she was reduced. **Esther** may have been apprehensive, not knowing if the king would grant her request. It was quite possible that he would fly into a rage, as he had done with Vashti (1:12).

7:5–6. However, this time **the king** did not become furious. He requested more information about who was doing **such a thing** to **Esther** and her people. Undoubtedly a look of terror was on Haman’s face as he realized that he was about to be exposed before the most powerful man on the face of the earth. **Haman** must have known that his execution was assured now that “fate” was working against him. **Esther** revealed that **vile Haman** was the **enemy** (cf. 3:10; 8:1; 9:10, 24).

7:7–8. Now **the king** was filled with **rage** (cf. 1:12 and cf. Haman’s anger on two occasions, 3:5; 5:9). The reason why the king left the palace to go outside to his **palace garden** is not given. It has been suggested that he went out to control his anger, but that is unlikely in view of his other behavior. Others have suggested that he was thinking up a way to execute Haman legally, but that is unlikely because any word of the king was law. Others have said that Xerxes was trying to figure out a way to spare Esther and her nation. Whatever the reason, Esther and **Haman** were left together in the banquet hall.

While begging **Esther** to spare **his life**—though he realized **that the king had already decided his fate**—Haman fell **on the couch** (cf. 1:6) on which **Esther was reclining**. Persians (and later Greeks, Romans, and Jews) reclined on couches when they ate. At just that moment (another so-called “happenstance” in the sovereignty of God) **the king** returned and accused **Haman** of assaulting **the queen**. However, Haman was not assaulting her but **was** merely **falling** on her couch. It is highly unlikely that Haman and Esther were alone in that banquet hall. No doubt people who were serving the meal and the guards were also present. The word **they** (7:8) suggests that several people were there. What is meant by their covering **Haman’s face** is uncertain. Probably they did this because Haman was now a doomed man, condemned to death.

7:9–10. **Harbona, one of the king’s seven eunuchs** (cf. 1:10), told **the king** about the **gallows** which Haman had built during the previous night to kill **Mordecai** (5:14). Possibly Haman was hated by many people in the city of Susa, especially in government circles. Many might have been glad to see Haman killed. Harbona obviously knew of Haman’s plot to kill Mordecai. At the king’s orders, **Haman** was taken and **hanged ... on his own gallows** (i.e., impaled; cf. comments on 2:23). The tables had now been turned, but the Jews were still left with a major problem. **The king’s** edict to eradicate them was still in effect. Per a Persian decree there would still be a great slaughter of many innocent people because of the wicked actions of a now-dead man.

Mathews, K. A. (1998). The Historical Books. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (p. 196). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Haman’s Hanging (7:1–10). Not only did Mordecai get the best of Haman, but Esther outsmarted him. On the following day, Esther assembled her guests for the second banquet, during which she revealed her entreaty (see 5:7–8). The fivefold repetition of “Queen Esther” in this chapter echoed Mordecai’s plea that she had come to power for this moment (4:14). Alluding to Haman’s bribe (3:9), she described herself and the Jews as “sold for destruction.” She identified Haman as the adversary.

Haman, true to his character as a blundering dunce, begged for the queen’s mercy, thus breaking protocol with the king’s harem. He magnified his folly by stumbling to her couch, creating the appearance of improprieties and thereby sealing his doom with the irate king. The gallows, whose references tower over much of the narrative (2:23; 5:14; 7:9–10; 8:7; 9:13, 25), afforded the Jews their vindication by the hanging of Haman.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Es 7). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.