

Esther 6
September 5, 2021

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: When you're having a hard time getting to sleep, what do you read or listen to in hopes of getting to sleep? [Let people engage]

Transition: King Xerxes was having a night in which he couldn't sleep. To help him get to sleep, he asked a servant to bring a book that chronicles the record of his reign. Yes, he wants to hear about all of his accomplishments so far as king! But this strategy to get back to sleep helps Mordecai. The king realizes that Mordecai exposed the assassination plot against King Xerxes, but Mordecai hasn't been recognized or honored for that. Let's begin and see how this story unfolds.

BOOK:

Mordecai Honored

6 That night the king could not sleep; so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him. ² It was found recorded there that Mordecai had exposed Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate King Xerxes.

³ "What honor and recognition has Mordecai received for this?" the king asked.

"Nothing has been done for him," his attendants answered.

⁴ The king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the palace to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows he had erected for him.

⁵ His attendants answered, "Haman is standing in the court."

"Bring him in," the king ordered.

⁶ When Haman entered, the king asked him, "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?"

Now Haman thought to himself, "Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?" ⁷ So he answered the king, "For the man the king delights to honor, ⁸ have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head. ⁹ Then let the robe and horse be entrusted to one of the king's most noble princes. Let them robe the man the king delights to honor, and lead him on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him, 'This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!'"

¹⁰ "Go at once," the king commanded Haman. "Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Do not neglect anything you have recommended."

¹¹ So Haman got the robe and the horse. He robed Mordecai, and led him on horseback through the city streets, proclaiming before him, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!"

¹² Afterward Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman rushed home, with his head covered in grief, ¹³ and told Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him.

His advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, “Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him—you will surely come to ruin!”¹⁴ While they were still talking with him, the king’s eunuchs arrived and hurried Haman away to the banquet Esther had prepared.

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:

As much as we detest Haman and his foul deeds, we must keep in mind that God loves sinners and wants to save them. God is long-suffering and brings various influences to bear upon people’s hearts as He seeks to turn them from their evil ways.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today’s Lesson:

ESTHER 6

Warning Signals

(In which God sounds an alarm,
but Haman won't listen)

You've probably seen the popular poster that reads: "Today is the first day of the rest of your life."

If anybody had said that to Haman as he left home early in the morning and hurried to the palace, they would have been wrong. They should have said, "Haman, today is the last day of your life!"

"As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezek. 33:11, dW.).

"The Lord ... is long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9, NKJV).

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!" (Matt. 23:37, NKJV)

On the basis of these three verses, we're safe in concluding that God's desire for sinners is not that they die but that they turn from their sins and be saved. There is joy in heaven when a sinner repents (Luke 15:7, 10), but the Lord won't force people to turn from their sins and trust His Son. "I wanted to ... but you were not willing."

As much as we detest Haman and his foul deeds, we must keep in mind that God loves sinners and wants to save them. God is long-suffering and brings various influences to bear upon people's hearts as He seeks to turn them from their evil ways. We will see some of these influences at work in the events of this chapter.

1. A night of discovery (Es. 6:1–5)

Once again, we see the sovereign hand of God invisibly at work in the life of King Ahasuerus. God was working out His purposes whether the king knew it or not, and you can see in this paragraph at least five evidences of God's providence.

The king's insomnia (Es. 6:1a). "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown," wrote Shakespeare. Solomon agreed: "The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep" (Ecc. 5:12, KJV). Was it the cares of state that kept the king awake? Was he worried about his finances? Did he eat and drink immoderately at the queen's feast? Or, was he puzzled about the queen's mysterious request?

Some or all of these worries may have played a part in the king's wakefulness, but behind them was the sovereign hand of the living God who watches over His people and never slumbers or sleeps (Ps. 121:3–4). God wanted the king to stay awake because He had something to tell him.

While visiting the zoo, I became fascinated with the "nocturnal exhibit." Here were animals that most of us never see because they sleep in the daytime and do their active living at night.

“While you are resting,” said one of the posters, “Nature is busily at work helping to keep the balance of life stable.” I thought to myself, “While I’m asleep, my Heavenly Father is busily at work making sure the new day will be just what He wants it to be.” God’s compassions never fail but are “new every morning” (Lam. 3:22–23) because God never sleeps and never stops working all things together for our good (Rom. 8:28).

The king’s choice of entertainment (Es. 6:1b). Ahasuerus wasn’t at a loss for sources of entertainment! He could have called a concubine from the harem, or he might have brought in the court musicians to play for him. He and his guards could have played a game together, or he might have asked for a troubadour to entertain him with a ballad. His decision to have a book read to him was certainly of God.

Can God direct us even in such minor matters as our recreations? He certainly can. When I was a young Christian, my attendance at a friend’s birthday party turned out to be one of the most important events in my life. Because of that evening, I made a decision about my educational plans. That decision eventually led to my changing schools and meeting the girl who became my wife. Never underestimate the extraordinary things God can do through an ordinary event like a birthday party.

The servant’s choice of books (Es. 6:1c). God directed Ahasuerus to ask for the kingdom chronicles to be read to him. (That would put anybody to sleep!) But God also directed that the servant take from the shelf the very book that recorded Mordecai’s service to the king five years before. Certainly there were other volumes available, but that’s the one the servant selected.

Can God direct in the books that people pick up and read? Yes, He can. Late in February 1916, a British student bought a book at a used-book stall in a railway station. He had looked at that book and rejected it at least a dozen times before, but that day he purchased it. It was *Phantastes* by George MacDonald, and the reading of that book eventually led to that young man’s conversion. Who was he? C.S. Lewis, perhaps the greatest and most popular apologist for the Christian faith of the middle-twentieth century. He wrote to a friend that he had picked up the book “by hazard,” but I believe God had directed his choice.

God can even direct *what we read* in a book. A young man in North Africa sought peace, first in sensual pleasures and then in philosophy, but only became more miserable. One day he heard a neighbor child playing a game and saying, “Take it and read! Take it and read!” The young man immediately picked up the Scriptures and “happened” to open to Romans 13:13–14; and those verses brought him to faith in Christ. We know that young man today as Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, and author of numerous Christian classics.

The king’s servant picked out the very book that told about Mordecai’s good deed and read that section to Ahasuerus. How marvelous is the providence of God!

The king’s delay in rewarding Mordecai (Es. 6:2–3). This is a key matter; for had Mordecai been honored five years before, the events of this critical day could not have occurred. Rewards and punishments were basic to the Persian system of maintaining loyalty, and it was unusual for meritorious service not to be rewarded. Then why was Mordecai’s good deed written down but forgotten? Did some junior clerk in the bureaucracy have a grudge against Mordecai? Did an office memo go astray? We don’t know; but this we do know, that God was in charge and already had the day selected for Mordecai to be honored.

Is God in charge of schedules? He certainly is! After befriending Pharaoh’s butler, Joseph thought it would lead to his being released from prison; but Joseph had to wait two more years until the time God had chosen for him to become second ruler in Egypt (Gen. 40:23–41:1). God had a specific day selected for the Jews to leave Egypt (Ex. 12:40–42; see Gen. 15:13–16), and

even the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem occurred “when the fullness of the time was come” (Gal. 4:4, KJV). In the midst of a confused and troubled world, the dedicated believer is able to say, “My times are in Thy hand” (Ps. 31:15, KJV) and find peace in God’s will.

It has often been said that “God’s delays are not God’s denials.” We sometimes get impatient and wonder why the wicked are prospering while the righteous are suffering, but God is never in a hurry. He is long-suffering toward the wicked because He wants them to repent, and He is patient with His people because He wants them to receive the right reward at the right time for the right purpose. If Mordecai was ever puzzled because the king promoted Haman but ignored him, he would soon find out that God had not made a mistake.

The timely arrival of Haman (Es. 6:4). It’s possible that Haman had been up all night, enjoying the supervision of the construction of the gallows on which he planned to hang (or impale) Mordecai. It was very early in the morning, but Haman wanted to see the king as soon as possible and get permission for the execution (Prov. 6:18). From Haman’s point of view, the earlier the hanging, the better. Mordecai’s body would be on exhibition all day, and this would delight Haman and also put fear into the hearts of the Jews in the city. After executing Mordecai, Haman could be certain that everybody would obey the king’s command and bow down to him.

Suppose Haman had arrived two hours later? The king would have consulted with other advisers, and Haman would have been left out of the celebration for Mordecai. God wanted Haman to spend the day honoring Mordecai and not gloating over Mordecai’s corpse on the gallows. God was actually warning Haman that he’d better change course or he would end up being destroyed.

When you review these evidences of the providence of God, you can’t help but want to praise and thank Him for the great God that He is. “The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He makes the plans of the peoples of no effect. The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of His heart to all generations” (Ps. 33:10–11, NKJV). “There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord” (Prov. 21:30, NIV). “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31, KJV)

2. A morning of decision (Es. 6:6–10)

It’s one thing to enter the king’s throne room, but now Haman was invited into the king’s bedchamber. This new honor only increased Haman’s pride and false confidence; he thought that he was in control of events and that Mordecai’s doom was sealed. And when the king asked for Haman’s advice on a personal matter, it inflated Haman’s ego even more.

In verse 6, the king’s question was vague and didn’t identify “the man whom the king delights to honor” (NKJV). In his pride, Haman concluded that the king was speaking about him. After all, what other man in the empire deserved such honor from the king? After the way Mordecai had insulted him, Haman would now get double revenge: First Mordecai would see Haman honored by the king, and then Mordecai would be hanged on the gallows. Haman would then climax the day by feasting “merrily” (5:14) with the king and queen.

Little did proud Haman realize that, before the day would end, the situation would be completely reversed: Haman would be forced to honor Mordecai before all the people of the city; Esther’s feast would turn out to be an exposé of the traitor; and Haman, not Mordecai, would end up on the gallows. “The righteous is delivered from trouble, and it comes to the wicked instead” (Prov. 11:8, NKJV).

“Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, and before honor is humility” (18:12, NKJV). The first half of that verse applies to Haman and the last half to Mordecai. What a

difference a little comma makes! Proverbs 29:23 gives the same message: “A man’s pride shall bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor” (NKJV). On which side of the comma do you live?

Thinking that the king was describing the honors he himself would receive, Haman asked for the very best: The man to be honored should be dressed in the king’s own apparel; he should ride on the king’s horse with the royal crest on its head; and one of the noble princes should lead the horse through the city and command the people to honor him. Such an event would almost be like a coronation!

The more I ponder the character of Haman, the more convinced I am that he wanted the throne for himself. As second man in the empire, if anything happened to Ahasuerus, Haman was certainly in the best position to capture the throne for himself. A proud man with selfish ambitions isn’t content to take second place if there’s any possible way to secure first place. If what is described in Esther 6:8–9 had actually been done for Haman, it would have given the people of Shushan the impression that Ahasuerus had chosen Haman to be his successor.

Note that King Ahasuerus called Mordecai “the Jew” (v. 10). You get the impression that the king completely forgot that he had permitted Haman to issue an edict to destroy the Jews. One day the king is an enemy of the Jews, and a few weeks later he honors one of the leading Jewish citizens! But Ahasuerus had a debt to pay, for Mordecai had saved his life. And perhaps in honoring Mordecai publicly, the king might help calm the troubled citizens of the city (3:15).

It was a morning of decision. The king had decided to reward Mordecai, and Haman had decided what the reward should be. What were the results?

3. A day of disgrace (Es. 6:11–14)

We wonder what Haman’s response was when the king told him to do all those things for Mordecai. Was he shocked? Did he show his astonishment openly? Probably not, because you didn’t express yourself that freely before an Eastern monarch. With the practiced duplicity that got him where he was, Haman bowed to the king’s commandment and obeyed.

First, he had to go out to the king’s gate, get Mordecai, and bring him into the palace. Then he had to dress Mordecai in the king’s robes. After putting Mordecai on the king’s horse, Haman had to lead the horse throughout the city and proclaim, “This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!” (v. 9, NIV) After he had visited all the city streets, Haman had to lead the horse back to the palace, remove the royal garments from Mordecai, and send him back to his place at the city gate. What irony! For almost a whole day Haman was the servant of Mordecai, commanding the people to bow down and honor him! The thing Mordecai wouldn’t do for Haman—bow down—Haman had to tell others to do for Mordecai!

How did this pageantry and prominence affect Mordecai? When it was over, he simply returned to his place at the gate and continued to serve the king. Applause doesn’t change truly humble people, for their values are far deeper. God can trust His blessings with the humble because they seek to honor only the Lord.

Haman’s reaction was quite different, for he was humiliated. He went home as soon as possible, his head covered as though he were grieving for the dead. This had been the way Mordecai had responded to the king’s edict concerning the Jews (4:1–2). Again, the tables were turned.

Even if they did bow down to him, Haman had no desire to see the public, because he had been humiliated before them and he knew that they were laughing at him behind his back. Such is the difference between reputation and character. Haman was a famous man, a man of

reputation, only because the king had made him so; but he was not a man of character. His reputation depended on his office, his wealth, and his authority, all of which could easily be taken from him.

What a contrast between Haman's family gathering in 6:13 and the one recorded in 5:10–12! Whereas before, Haman had boasted of his greatness, now he had to confess how he had been humiliated. If there had been any other official on the horse but Mordecai the Jew, Haman might have been able to handle the situation; but having to give honor to a Jew demoralized Haman completely.

At this point, his wife and counselors made an interesting statement: "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish descent, you will not prevail against him but will surely fall before him" (6:13, NKJV). *His humiliation in the streets and these words in his house should have alarmed Haman and moved him to change his course of action.* God was warning Haman, but the proud prime minister wouldn't heed the warning. Had he sincerely repented and asked for mercy, it's likely that he could have saved his own life and the lives of his ten sons.

The Persians were a very superstitious people, and the advisers saw in the events of the day a "bad omen" for Haman's future. Perhaps they were also familiar with God's covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3), or maybe they just knew Jewish history. At any rate, they saw Haman falling from his place of prominence; and this dire prediction should have brought him to the place of humility and repentance.

While Haman was discussing his misfortunes with his wife and advisers, the king's eunuchs arrived at the door to escort Haman to the queen's banquet. He had planned to go "merrily" to the feast, with Mordecai safely out of the way (5:14); but now everything had changed.

What would happen next? And what was the mysterious petition that Queen Esther would reveal at the banquet?

Off Haman went with the eunuchs to his last meal.

When God sounds the alarm, it pays to stop, look, and listen—and obey.

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. 708-710) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

4. MORDECAI HONORED BY XERXES (CHAP. 6)

The tension which had been building throughout the account now began to dissipate. Previously understated facts take on new meanings. Almost incredible circumstances point to God's hand guiding the course of events. The entire course of history for the Jewish nation was changed because a pagan king, hundreds of miles from the center of God's activities in Jerusalem, could not sleep. Jewish people all over the Persian Empire, and especially in Palestine itself, were unaware of God's dealings till long after the fact. But read in the light of God's covenants to Abraham, Moses, and David, the readers could well appreciate the sovereign action of God.

6:1–3. During the **night** before Esther's second banquet, **Xerxes** was unable to **sleep** (cf. Dan. 6:18). The author had not written why Esther asked for a delay before telling the king her request (Es. 5:7), but the reason was now made clear. God was going to elevate **Mordecai**, to prepare **the king** to react unfavorably to Haman. Because of the king's sleeplessness he asked for some **of the chronicles** (court annals; cf. 2:23) to be **read to him**. Sometimes, as is known by many people with insomnia, reading can help put a person to sleep! Through Xerxes' insomnia

God caused him to learn about Mordecai's deed. Of all the texts that could have been selected by the librarian (from the records of Xerxes' 12 years of rule up to that time), the one that contained the account of Mordecai's uncovering the assassination plot (2:21–23) was read to **the king**. Extrabiblical sources confirm that the Persian kings maintained an elaborate recording system (cf. Ezra 6:1–2). Herodotus noted that the king kept especially clear records of those who served him well. Once again God's sovereignty is evident. When Xerxes asked **what honor** Mordecai had been given for saving the king's life (about five years before; cf. Es. 2:16 with 3:7), the king found that he had not been rewarded. Undoubtedly a bureaucratic oversight had occurred. However, if Mordecai had been immediately rewarded for his saving the king there would have been no need for the elaborate plan which would soon be carried out by the king through the mouth of Haman (6:6–10). Once again unusual circumstances worked to preserve God's people.

6:4–6. In the morning (cf. 5:14) **Haman ... entered the palace outer court** to ask that **Mordecai** be hanged. **The king** asked **who was in the court** and **Haman** "just happened" to be there. Obviously, the tables were being turned. Everything that was meant for evil against the Jews was turning out for good for them. What a comfort this must have been to the original Jewish readers in postexilic Palestine as they observed their tenuous position among the nations. They could rejoice in the fact that God cared about them and that He would continue to preserve them as He had under Xerxes.

When **Haman** was ushered into the king's presence, he must have felt honored. And when **the king asked ... What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?** the egotistical **Haman** was beside **himself** with joy and enthusiasm. He thought that **the king** was speaking about him.

6:7–9. Haman responded to **the king** by mentioning several things that should be done for the person **the king** wished to honor: (1) Haman recommended that such a man should have the appearance of royalty, by wearing a kingly **robe** and riding a **royal** steed, one **the king** had already **ridden**. Some have suggested that the Bible is in error when it speaks of a horse wearing **a royal crest ... on its head**. They think that the man, not the horse, should have worn the crown. However, a relief actually shows a horse with a crown on its head, signifying that it was a royal horse. (2) Haman said that the honored man should be served by one of the **most noble princes**. (3) The princes were to take the man **through the city** on this **horse**, clearing the way before him and pointing out to all who watched that this **man** was honored by **the king** (cf. Gen. 41:42–43). Haman did not need money (cf. Es. 3:9). He craved respect from his peers and from the population at large (cf. 5:11). Even though he was fabulously wealthy and had more power than anyone outside the royal family (3:1), he wanted even more respect from the people of the city. Haman's lust for respect (from Mordecai) is what got him into trouble in the first place (cf. 3:2, 5; 5:9, 13).

6:10–13. Haman's ideas apparently appealed to **the king**; he **commanded Haman** to carry them out **for Mordecai the Jew**. This is the first of five times Mordecai is called "the Jew" (cf. 8:7; 9:29, 31; 10:3), apparently to highlight the fact that a Jew, though opposed by **Haman**, was given a prominent position in Susa in the Persian Empire. What a turn of events; what irony for Haman! **Mordecai**, whom he hated, had to be honored by **Haman**. He who wanted respect *from* Mordecai had to give respect *to* Mordecai. Haman had to carry out the king's order even though it embarrassed and angered him greatly. **Afterward he rushed home**, had **his head covered in grief**, and **told Zeresh his wife and friends** the reversal of his fortunes.

Earlier Mordecai had publicly grieved over his people (4:1); now Haman privately grieved over his own humiliation. When Haman had left his wife in the morning he had been elated.

Now the bottom had fallen out from under him. To make matters worse, **his advisers and his wife** all saw nothing but trouble for him in the future. They noted that Mordecai's **Jewish origin** meant that Haman was doomed. Exactly what they meant by that statement is difficult to determine. It is known that in the Persian religions much was made of omens and signs. Fate, chance, and luck were considered important in everyday life. The Book of Esther stands as a polemic against such a fatalistic view of the world. To many who are not of the covenant community, Israel, the world's events appear to be fatalistic and to happen by chance. But those who are the people of God's covenant know that God overrules fate. He moves events and circumstances for His good pleasure. Pagan advisers and the pagan wife of an evil man unknowingly stated the central thrust of this book: neither Haman nor any other human can possibly **stand against** God's Chosen People, the Jewish nation (many of whom were then back in the Promised Land with a rebuilt temple, offering sacrifices to God at Jerusalem).

6:14. Now, with his world crashing down around his head, **Haman** was hustled off to Esther's second **banquet**, which once he desired but now dreaded. He may have well wondered what the king would say to him at the banquet.

Haman stands as a prototype of all anti-God activists who oppose God's people. Like authors of many short stories, God led the author of the Book of Esther to make his historical figures into symbols of much larger proportions. As the regathered nation read this account, they could have looked back over their history and noted other times when men had tried to set aside God's promises to their nation and had failed. They could therefore rest assured that in the future God would do the same. Even though God's people often disobeyed Him, even though they were often not spiritually or even physically where God wanted them to be, deliverance would come. God would so work in history that He would be vindicated and His people delivered.

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

MORDECAI DEFEATS HAMAN (6:1–7:10)

This section features the key reversal in Haman's and Mordecai's fates. Mordecai was honored by the king, much to Haman's humiliation. The final indignity of foolish Haman was his pathetic effort to save himself from the gallows.

Mordecai Honored by Haman (6:1–14). The unstated reason for the king's insomnia was God's providence. To pass the sleepless night, servants brought the royal annals where Mordecai's deed of saving the king was read (see 2:19–23). Haman was consulted, but ironically his egotism caused him unintentionally to honor Mordecai. The depiction of Mordecai dressed in royalty and being led on horseback by Haman anticipates their inverted roles to come. Even his friends and wife voiced the theological proposition of the book: Mordecai is invincible because he is a Jew.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Es 6:1-14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.