

Notes on Esther 5

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C. Esther's First Banquet for Haman and the King – Chap. 5

Esther appears before the king – 5:1-4

Verse 1

1. List several reasons why it would have been hard for Esther to seek an audience with the king.
2. Application: List some admirable qualities we can observe in Esther.

Esther stands before the king.

On the third day (of the time the Jews were fasting – 4:16) Esther made her appearance before the king. She put on her royal apparel and stood in the inner court across from the place where the king sat on his throne. We should appreciate the courage this took, as described in 4:8-17.

Her request would be difficult to make for several reasons: (1) She sought to defeat a decree made by the authority of the king. (2) She knew she had a powerful adversary in Haman, who determinedly hated Mordecai and the Jews. (3) She would have to reveal for the first time that she herself was a Jew. How would the king react to this? (4) Finally, she must go unannounced before the king, an act which of itself would automatically cost her life if the king showed her no favor.

Yet she had resolved to do what was right and needed (4:13-16). She had diligently requested God's blessings on her efforts (4:16). So she then acted courageously on her resolve. So we must do when facing opposition or great responsibility. Let us too proceed when we must preach to influential people, rebuke a brother for sin, stand for our convictions against angry family and friends, etc.

Verse 2,3

3. What did the king do when Esther stood before him? What promise did he make her? (Think: Do all the bad things we anticipate really come to pass?)

The king spares Esther.

When the king saw Esther standing in the court, she found favor in his sight. So he extended the golden scepter to grant her permission to approach him, thereby sparing her life. She came forward and touched the top of the scepter (apparently the proper means of response for one who had been permitted to approach the king).

The first hurdle she so greatly feared had been crossed (4:11). Surely we must see God's providence at work. Note that no miracles had occurred, but her plea had thus far been answered.

The king promises to grant Esther's wish

Then the king asked Esther what her request was. He promised to give her whatever she asked for, even if she asked for half of his kingdom! What a reception! Surely this was more than Esther dared even hope for, though she still had not reached her ultimate goal.

It is interesting to observe that many of the bad things we fear never really happen. But this is especially true when, like Esther, we put our faith in God. Instead of death, as she feared, she had been offered half of the greatest empire in the world.

Verse 4

4. What was Esther's first request (v4)? (Think: Why might she have done this instead of just making her ultimate request?)
5. Special Assignment: What harmful methods did Esther avoid that some wives sometimes use to get their way with their husbands?

Esther gives the invitation to the first banquet

Esther did not immediately make known her real request. She simply began by requesting Haman and the king to come to a banquet she had prepared that day.

Here we see great wisdom and patience on Esther's part. It may have been a temptation, after so favorable a reception, to proceed with her ultimate request. But instead, she courted the king's favor and prepared his heart to receive her ultimate request. Her request was great, her purpose momentous, and the need overwhelming. She did not rush to the conclusion but proceeded calmly and wisely.

We should learn from her example, when we attempt such serious matters. Note that she first obtained God's favor by prayer and fasting. Then she courted her husband's favor by a banquet. Then when she had the favor of God and man, she made her request.

Her method pleased the king and led him to look with favor toward her request. It also showed him how seriously she took the matter she was about to request and how much she wanted his favor. And finally, it gave opportunity to seek the most favorable time to speak. Yet consider how much turmoil all this must have cost Esther in the meanwhile!

Note further that Esther realized that "the way to a man's heart is through his stomach." She did not make bold, domineering demands, nor did she nag, nor did she manipulate him, nor did she seek to embarrass him, nor did she whine and complain, as some wives do. She respectfully sought to please him and gain his consent by kind attentions to him. Let godly wives take note!

The king and Haman attend the first banquet.

Verse 5,6

6. How did the king respond to Esther's first request? What did he say to her at her banquet?

The king calls Haman and they go to the banquet.

Ahasuerus gave order for Haman to be called so they can attend the banquet, as Esther had requested. Both of them were in attendance. (It is interesting how both were available on such short notice. This was providence at work, though it is also possible that Esther checked on the men's schedules before she gave the invitation. If the king could not have attended that day, she would presumably have set another time for them to come.)

At the banquet, the king again asked Esther what her request was. And again he promised to do or give whatever she wanted, even up to half of his kingdom. This shows that he knew that the banquet itself was not the ultimate goal Esther sought. She had some further request to make, and he realized it.

We are told that this is a "banquet of wine," but remember that "wine" in the Bible is not always intoxicating. The same word is used for grape juice, whether fermented or not. See Isaiah 16:10; Jeremiah 48:33; Isaiah 65:8; Genesis 40:9-11; Revelation 19:15.

Verses 7,8

7. What request did she make then? (Think: Would you have been as patient as Esther was in getting to the point?)

Esther requests still another banquet.

Esther requested simply that the king and Haman come to another banquet the next day. She promised at that time to let the king know her request.

It is difficult to believe that, in making this request for a second banquet, Esther had any purposes other than the same ones she had for requesting the first banquet (see on v4 above). Nevertheless, the events that eventually transpired between the two banquets were absolutely essential to the success of her request. This shows how fortunate it was that she requested the second banquet. Once again God's providence was clearly at work, though even Esther could not have understood it at the time.

Haman determines to hang Mordecai

Verse 9

8. How did Haman feel as he left the banquet? What upset him as he went home?
(Think: Why might Esther have invited Haman to the banquets?)

Haman's joy and frustration

Haman left Esther's first banquet feeling joyful and glad of heart. He had been honored by the queen, who had invited him personally to, not just one banquet, but two! Enjoy it while you can, Haman!

But as he was going home, Haman was confronted with the one great grief of his life. Once again he saw Mordecai at the king's gate. As in the past, Mordecai refused to stand or tremble before Haman – i.e., he refused to give special honor to Haman. This infuriated Haman (cf. 3:2).

Note how Mordecai persisted in refusing to bow to Haman. Even after his conduct had motivated Haman to decree the destruction of Mordecai and all the Jews, still he would not do what violated the law of God. Clearly he was deeply upset to see the consequences that could come on the Jews (4:1-4), and he had taken great steps to try to overcome that problem (4:8ff). But the one step he refused to take was to bow to Haman – an act which he was convinced would be sinful. He would stand firm for the law of God regardless of the consequences. We should learn the lesson. How many of us often give in to far less pressure from friends and spiritual enemies!

Verses 10-12

9. List four things Haman bragged about when he got home. What did he say upset him?

Haman brags to his family and friends

Despite his anger at Mordecai, Haman did nothing at the moment. Rather, he went on home and called a gathering of his friends and his wife Zeresh. His purpose, we will see, was to brag about his greatness and bask in the glory of his "fan club." He gave them four proofs of his greatness, all of them material in nature.

(1) He told of his great **riches**. We are not told specifically how rich he was, but apparently his wealth was remarkable enough that he and his friends considered it to be exceptional. He had enough that he had been willing to offer the king ten thousand talents of silver for decreeing the death of the Jews (3:9).

(2) He had a multitude of **children**. Esther 9:10 says he had ten sons. This was enough that he thought it would impress his friends. Note how, in contrast to today, numerous children was then viewed as a great blessing and a sign of eminence (cf. the stories of Jacob and Job; Psalms 127,128).

(3) He had great **power and authority**. The king had promoted him and set him above the other officials and servants (cf. 3:1,2).

(4) The final proof of Haman's greatness was his **honor**. The proof of this was that he and he alone had been invited to accompany the king to a banquet with the queen. And not only that, but he was invited back to another banquet the next day! This he mistook as a great honor showing that he was above all men in the empire except the king, even in the eyes of the queen.

Here again we see the galling vanity and conceit of this man. He was so stuck on himself and so inflated by his own greatness that he actually called his own brag session! And note that the measure of greatness to him, as with nearly all conceited men, consisted entirely of material

pursuits. He considered himself to be great because of apparent success in physical possessions and honors. And note further how he can interpret events such as the invitation to Esther's banquets as having no purpose other than to show his greatness.

Surely we should learn here the lesson of the fleeting and unsatisfying nature of such conceit based on material things. In his very next breath he will acknowledge how unhappy he still is. And we will see further that he is just one day away from complete destruction. Pride goes before a fall. And let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall!

Verses 13,14

10. What did his inner circle advise him to do? How did he respond?

11. Application: Describe several characteristics of Haman that we should avoid.

Haman states his great anger at Mordecai.

Having listed all his great honors, Haman then stated his great frustration at Mordecai. All these great honors and blessings, he says, avail nothing to him so long as Mordecai sits at the king's gate – i.e., as long as he continues to just sit there, refusing to rise and do obeisance as others did.

Note how this shows even more the colossal enormity of Haman's ego. Having all these great honors, he was yet not satisfied. It all meant nothing to him, because one piddling little Jew refused to bow to him! It was not enough to have wealth, family, and honor from the whole empire. All these people who did honor him meant nothing to him so long as there was just one man who refused to honor him! The idea seems to be that a man so supremely great as Haman thought he was, should not have to put up with such a sleight and disrespect from anyone, let alone such a dog as Mordecai!

This is typical of vain, greedy human nature. Instead of counting our many blessings, we tend to complain about the insignificant problems we have. Instead of appreciating what we have received, we worry about some minor imperfection in our circumstances.

And note how this demonstrates the failure of material prosperity to satisfy. One would think that someone so richly blessed as Haman would be satisfied. No matter how much we have, those whose joy and happiness in life is found in emphasizing material things think that they would be happy if only they could have just a little bit more. The fact is that material things do not ever really satisfy no matter how much we have. People who seek success in material circumstances will always want more. As long as they see any flaw, minor irritation, or unfulfilled desire, they will not be satisfied!

Haman plans Mordecai's death.

But Haman's "fan club" had a solution for his dilemma! Perhaps he hoped they would come up with a suggestion when he called the meeting. His wife and friends suggested that the simple solution would be to eliminate Mordecai. If he was such a source of irritation to such a great man as Haman, he should just get rid of him! They suggested he build a gallows and then get the king's permission to hang Mordecai on it. Then he could be truly happy and enjoy the banquet with the queen! All this sounded good to Haman, so he had the gallows built 50 cubits (75 feet – seven stories) high!

See again the conceit of Haman and of his friends on his behalf. They all just assume that a man of Haman's great stature has the right to just wipe out anybody who in any way crosses him, just like swatting a fly! And further they assume that surely a great man like Haman could sway the king to accomplish a little thing like this at Haman's bidding! Then, having satisfied his callous pride by shedding the blood of a righteous man, he could go calmly on and eat a pleasant feast with joy instead of remorse or guilt! See how ego drives a man to such incredible disregard for others. He himself is so important that others are as nothing. He has every right to wipe them out if they so much as cause him a little inconvenience! They are nothing. He is everything!

Note also the danger of bad advice and of having close companionships with people who encourage us in sin and have no scruples against evil. One can be swayed by associates. Haman had influenced Ahasuerus to allow a decree that would wipe out an entire nationality of people. Haman in turn was influenced by his friends to determine to casually slay an innocent man. Note especially the influence of his wife. She could, had she chosen, have been a great blessing to him and given wise counsel. Instead she became a curse to him by joining in giving evil advice.

Here we see Haman at the pinnacle of his glory and power. Here he was so confident that he had everything under control. All the cards were in his hand. But, "what a difference a day makes." As we enter the next chapter we will see that, unknown to Haman, the circumstances that he interpreted as being proof that he was at the peak of success, actually were the circumstances that would bring him down to total destruction.

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