

## Notes on Esther 6

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### III. Haman's Defeat & the Jews' Victory - Chap. 6-10

Note that we stand at a dramatic turning point in the story. Up to this point Haman had been rising in power and honor. He had the upper hand and felt assured of success in his efforts to destroy Mordecai and the Jews (5:9-14). We will see how, beginning with this very night, God's providence began to turn all against him. His defeat was so complete that, in one single day he not only failed to achieve his desire to slay Mordecai, but rather he himself fell completely from the king's favor and was slain. Note also how all the story is building to a climax in a single day, as two opposing forces were quite independently seeking the king's favor to achieve totally opposite goals: Haman to slay Mordecai and Esther to deliver Mordecai and all the Jews.

#### A. Mordecai Honored for His Loyalty to the King – Chap. 6

##### *The king is reminded of Mordecai's loyalty*

Verses 1,2

1. What problem did the king have that night? What did he do as a result (v1)?
2. What did he learn about (v2)? How would this relate to Haman's claim that the Jews were of no profit to the king?

##### **The king learns of Mordecai's good deed.**

On the very night between the two banquets, on the eve of Esther's request to save the Jews and the eve of Haman's request to kill Mordecai, an event occurred that brought Mordecai (and the Jews) to the king's favor.

The king was unable to sleep that night, so he called for the chronicles of his rulership to be brought and read to him. As the chronicles were read, one event mentioned was the fact that Mordecai had saved the king's life by informing him of the conspiracy of Bigthana and Teresh (2:21ff).

No reason is given why the king could not sleep, but surely God's providence was behind it. See how God uses such small things to bring about great purposes. Again no miracle was worked, no great impressive ritual, yet God's providence worked one of the greatest deliveries of history (cf. 4:14). And one thing God used was the sleeplessness of the king. If God can use such small things for great good, surely He can use you and me!

The importance of the fact this information came to the king's attention at this particular time cannot be over-emphasized. By this means God brought Mordecai to the king's favor at the very time that he needed the king's favor.

Note that Haman had argued for the destruction of the Jews on the grounds they were unprofitable to the king (3:8). Yet here was conclusive proof to the king that one Jew was incredibly profitable to him and had in fact saved his life. Another Jew of great value to him was his queen, but he had yet to learn of her nationality. This information could not have come before the king at a more opportune time, for unknown to the king, both Haman and Esther were about to make great requests of the king both regarding this very Mordecai and his people.

Verse 3

3. What question did the king ask, and what was the answer?

##### **The king inquires regarding the honor given Mordecai**

Having been reminded of Mordecai's loyal service to him, the king wondered what had been done to reward this service. His attendants informed him that no reward had been given. So the king proceeded to search for a suitable reward.

Several lessons should be learned here. First, it was only right for the king to reward Mordecai. People in authority ought to reward those who serve faithfully, not just punish disobedience. Second, we see Mordecai's attitude toward the reward. He seemingly had no bitterness toward the king for having not rewarded him. When he was rewarded, there is no evidence that he became proud or conceited (like Haman) – cf. v12. He apparently had done service to the king because it was right to do, not because he sought honor from men. Unlike Haman, who later suggested great honors when he thought he would receive them (vv 6ff), Mordecai had apparently made no request whatever for reward. And when none came, he made no complaint to the king.

Finally note, however, that ultimately he received the greatest reward he could hope for. When that reward came, it came at a time that made it far more valuable to Mordecai than any reward that could have been given at the time he did the good deed. Consider the application to our reward. Some want immediate benefits from their conduct, so they emphasize material pursuits. Christians may not receive their rewards immediately, so it may seem (as with Mordecai) that the righteous receive evil, not good, for their reward. But the reward will surely come, and when it does it will be greater than any reward that could be given during this life.

### *The king requires Haman to honor Mordecai.*

Verses 4-6

4. Who had come during the meantime? What did the king ask him?
5. Whom did Haman think the king wanted to honor? What does this show about him?

#### **The king seeks advice.**

The king was still trying to think of a good way to reward Mordecai, so he asked who was standing in the court. That is, he wondered who might be present that he could discuss the matter with and get some ideas. Apparently by that time it was day and Haman had come to the palace to make his request for permission from the king to kill Mordecai. So the king's servants told him that Haman was there, so the king ordered to have him brought in.

The irony here is amazing. The king wanted to ask Haman's advice about how to honor Mordecai, yet at that very moment the reason Haman was there was to ask permission to hang Mordecai! From this point on the irony grows.

#### **The king inquires of Haman.**

When Haman had entered, the king placed before Haman the question of what he should do to honor the man whom he sought to honor. The king did not name whom he spoke of, but Haman in his mammoth conceit thought surely the king must be speaking of Haman himself. "Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?" So he thought up the very greatest honor that he himself would like to receive.

Again we see the incredible vanity of this man Haman. First, he did not even ask who was being discussed but simply assumed without evidence that it had to be himself who would be honored. In his conceit, he could not imagine that anyone else deserved to be honored! It would have been bad enough for him to think that no one would be honored above him, but the king had never even said whom he intended to honor. He simply said that he wanted to honor someone. Haman apparently assumed that, beside himself, no one deserved honor!

Second, thinking he would be honored, he presumptuously sought the greatest honor he could think of, instead of humbly seeking little or no honor. He was a glutton for honor. He had just spent an evening boasting to his family and friends about his own greatness (5:10-14). But was he satisfied with the great honors he had? No! Honor is temporary and, like wealth, one must always seek ever more and more hoping to achieve satisfaction by it.

Now note the irony. Haman sought death for Mordecai and honor for himself. Yet on this very day he would see Mordecai receive the very honor that he sought and invented for himself.

And likewise, he himself would receive the very death that he had planned for Mordecai. And all this was by God's providence and answer to prayer.

Verses 7-9

6. Describe the honor Haman suggested be given.

### **Haman's advice to the king**

According to his presumptuous vanity, Haman proceeded to suggest great honors to be given, all the while thinking that he himself would receive those honors. So he suggested that the man be clothed in royal garments that the king himself sometimes wore and that he be placed upon a horse that the king himself sometimes rode, the horse having a royal crest placed on its head. Then one of the king's highest nobles should be assigned to lead the horse with its rider throughout the city square proclaiming that this was the way the king honored the man who had pleased him. Such would be comparable to our "ticker-tape parades," though in a way it would be an even greater honor, since it was given at the command of the greatest king on earth. The man in effect would be honored as "king for a day"!

Verses 10,11

7. What command did the king then give? Who led the horse?

8. Explain how this outcome differed from what Haman had intended to achieve that day.

### **The king commands this honor for Mordecai.**

When Haman had given this elaborate description, the king was so pleased by it that he commanded that all that Haman had spoken should be done immediately in every detail with no exceptions. But, instead of this being done to Haman as he expected, it was to be for the honor of Mordecai the Jew! Worse yet (from Haman's viewpoint), Haman was the one to be assigned to give the honor. He had to lead the horse! And that is exactly what Haman did.

Imagine the shame and horror Haman felt when he heard this verdict. Not only would this great honor not be given to him as he had planned, but instead it would be given to the one whom Haman considered to be his greatest enemy. And Haman himself would have to give it. And he had himself invented the whole thing!

The irony abounds. He had come to the king's presence to ask permission to *kill* Mordecai. Instead, he ended up honoring him. He hated Mordecai, because Mordecai refused to honor Haman as Haman thought he deserved. Now, instead of eliminating his rival, Haman must be the one to give him honor! (Cf. 5:9,13.)

Note that this decree not only honored Mordecai for his righteous conduct, but (unknown to the king) it simultaneously punished Haman for his vanity. And in reality Haman was punishing himself. This is how sin often acts. Had Haman not been so conceited in the first place, he would not have been bothered by Mordecai's conduct, Mordecai would not have been his enemy, and he would not have been bothered by having to honor Mordecai. Haman had never really been harmed at all. Yet he was mortally grieved, because his vanity and pride had been wounded. His pride itself was punishing him! It was, in effect, a self-inflicted wound. So sin often does to people, even in this life. Yet neither Mordecai's reward nor Haman's punishment were yet complete.

## *Haman's friends predict his downfall.*

Verses 12,13

9. How did Haman return home this time? What did he tell his wife and friends?
10. What conclusion did his friends reach? (Think: What does this show about the friends?)

### **Haman returns home mourning.**

Having been so honored, Mordecai returned to his previous pursuits at the king's gate. Nothing is said about any great pride on his part as a result of the honor he had received. This contrasted to Haman who let honor so go to his head (5:9-14) that when he felt slighted he was really upset (5:13).

After honoring Mordecai, Haman went home in mourning having covered his head. Why? Who had wronged him? No one! Only his pride had been wounded. When he was honored, he gloated. When others were honored, he pouted and threw a tantrum. In contrast, Mordecai showed no signs of gloating over Haman or bragging to his friends, etc. Instead, he simply went back to doing what he had before.

### **Haman tells these latest events to his wife and friends.**

Having returned home, Haman once again calls his wife and friends together and tells them the latest events, as he had the day before (5:9-14). But his story the day before had been all joy and glory (except for Mordecai's refusal to bow to him). Whereas, on this day he sulked and sought solace for his shame.

Amazingly, his wife and friends, who had so praised him the day before, now predicted his downfall! They said that, if Mordecai was of Jewish descent and had begun to prevail, then there was no way Haman could prevail against him but Haman would surely fall before him!

Note the fickleness of friends, especially when they follow a man for the sake of his fame, wealth, and glory. They are fair-weather friends who, as quickly as they flocked to a man in his time of glory, will desert him when he falls.

Yet is not clear how they could be so sure Mordecai would prevail over Haman. They said Mordecai would prevail because he was a Jew. But they had already known Mordecai was a Jew, since that was the reason Haman sought to kill him (5:13,14). So why conclude now that Mordecai would prevail? Perhaps they saw the significance of the turn of events. Haman had intended to kill Mordecai. But not only had he failed in that purpose, but he had actually ended up honoring Mordecai. Perhaps the friends recognized this as an omen of things to come. Perhaps they also remembered the history of past victories of Israelites over their enemies. They were like the "fans" that cheer on an athletic team when victory seems assured, but then turn in disgust when it begins to lose.

Verse 14

11. What summons did Haman then receive?

### **The call to Esther's second banquet**

Now as the irony multiplies, even as his friends were making their predictions of Haman's downfall, the call came from the king's eunuchs for Haman to attend Esther's second banquet. He obviously was feeling bad – not nearly as wonderful as he had felt the previous day when he received the invitation to this banquet. But still he was totally unaware of what lay ahead for him at the banquet. The worst was yet to come.

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