

## Notes on Esther 7

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### B. Esther's Request & Haman's Downfall – Chap. 7

The story is building to the climax. The “stage” is now set for Esther's request. She has done all she can to prepare the king to be receptive. The king himself, by God's providence, has a favorable attitude toward Mordecai brought to his mind just this very morning. And Haman has been humbled by having to be the one to honor Mordecai. With this background, the story approaches the second banquet.

#### *Esther makes her request*

Verses 1,2

1. At the second banquet what did the king ask, and what promise did he make?

#### **The king and Haman attend Esther's second banquet.**

Haman and the king then came to Esther's second banquet, as she had requested. At this point neither the king nor Haman was aware of the nature of Esther's request.

However, the king again asked Esther what her request was. And he again offered to give her or do for her whatever she wanted, up to half of his kingdom. He had made this offer twice before (5:3,4,6). Now the time had come for Esther to speak.

Verses 3,4

2. What was her request, and why did she make it?

3. What problem did she say she could have borne without speaking? In that case, how did she describe the king's loss?

#### **Esther's request**

Esther began her request by speaking respectfully: “If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king...” It is always proper to show respect to those in proper authority when we make request of them. Mordecai's refusal to bow and show *undue* reverence to Haman would not deny or contradict our responsibility to give civil rulers the honor that is properly due them – Romans 13:1-7.

Esther then requested that her life and that of her people (race or nationality) may be spared, because they had been sold to be killed, destroyed, and annihilated. She requested that her life and her people's life be given in response to her petition. “Sold” seems to refer to Haman's offer to pay the king to allow the Jews' death. She said she would have remained silent if it had been simply a matter that they would become enslaved; but when they were condemned to death, she felt she had to speak.

But in any case, she argued, no amount of price paid could really compensate the loss the king would sustain. This appears to refer to Haman's contention that the people were of no profit to the king (3:8), but if they were killed, he would pay the king (3:9). So Esther claims the people were of great profit to the king such that no amount of compensation could really make up for it.

Notice the courage that Esther had in speaking, because she knew her cause was just and God was with her. She had made preparation wisely and carefully to gain the king's favor. But the time had come to speak. No amount of preparation could avoid the fact that sooner or later she had to speak up.

Likewise, there are times when we need to pray for God's help and make preparations to do God's will. But no amount of prayer or preparation eliminates the need for us to act. Prayer does not remove our responsibility to do what we can in God's work. The time comes when we must

**act.** Let us truly trust in God's power and protection, but let us also realize that often He uses **our effort** to accomplish His work, so we must do what is best to bring about the needed result.

Verse 5

4. What questions did the king ask, and what answer did she give?

### **The king asks who is the guilty party.**

The king's response was to ask who would be so presumptuous in his heart as to dare to seek to slay all the queen's people. He was clearly angry, and rightly so, that anyone would seek to do such a thing. But remember that he did not know at this point that Esther was a Jew, so he did not realize Haman's involvement (perhaps he did not even know that it was the Jews that Haman had been discussing when he had made his request of the king). Still further, he surely did not yet realize that he himself had been an accessory to the act, since he had given his approval to it. Like David, who could see an act as being evil when it related to someone else's conduct, he did not see his own act as wrong despite his guilt.

Verse 6

5. Application: What can we learn about our teaching from: (1) the fact that Esther directly named the man who was guilty, and (2) she invited him to the meeting and accused him to his face?

6. How did Haman feel at hearing Esther's accusation? What lessons can we learn?

### **Esther identifies Haman's guilt.**

Having been asked directly who had sought to slay her people, Esther then boldly and plainly identified the guilty man: "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!"

Notice that Esther was not unwilling to name the specific individual and state plainly that he was evil. Some people today, even in the church, say such should not be done. They tell us not to name specific religious groups or individuals and say they are guilty of sin. But Esther did so, as did Jesus and His apostles. So we must do when it needs to be done for the cause of truth.

Notice also that Esther accused her adversary to his face. Haman was at this banquet and heard her accusation, because she herself had invited him. This gave him an opportunity to defend himself and present his side of the story, if he so chose. She could have chosen to invite only the king, so she could manipulate and politic against Haman behind his back. But she chose rather to confront the issue before the king in the presence of the one she accused. She treated Haman fairly despite the gross and criminal mistreatment he had himself committed against Esther's cousin Mordecai and the whole Jewish people. So we ought to fairly treat even those who oppose us. We should plainly speak against their error, but we should do so fairly.

Having heard the queen's accusation, Haman was terrified. Note how quickly his boasting vanity had changed to cowardice. The man had not considered, when he determined to make the decree, whom all it might affect. He had sought to destroy Mordecai and all his people. Since then he had learned the great favor that Mordecai had before the king, and here he came face to face with the fact that his decree would also lead to the destruction of the queen herself! And the king had just, in Haman's hearing, repeatedly promised to give the queen anything she wants!

Haughty men tend to over-estimate their power. This is one reason why pride goes before a fall. Haman had been so proud of the fact that Esther had invited him to these banquets, but here he realized too late that his decree had far more wide-reaching consequences than he had anticipated. What had seemed to him, in his vanity, to be an easy thing to accomplish, he now realized may be well beyond his ability to carry out. In fact, it was becoming clear that he might be the one to be destroyed. Especially such consequences follow when one is proud against the Lord.

## *The defeat and death of Haman*

Verse 7

7. What did the king do after he heard Esther's request? What did Haman do in the meanwhile?

### **The king leaves to consider the matter.**

Having heard the evidence against Haman, whom he had previously favored highly, the king in anger arose, left the banquet, and went for a walk in the palace garden. No doubt he felt angry, not only because Haman had issued a decree which, if carried out, would kill the queen, but also doubtless because Haman had betrayed his trust. He had granted Haman high position and great power and had allowed Haman to issue the death decree as he saw fit, but now the king realized how Haman had betrayed his trust and abused his power. He saw now, presumably for the first time, the tragic danger of allowing a trusted counselor to issue a death decree without himself carefully checking out the consequences.

Rather than making a foolish decision, however, as he had done when Haman had asked to issue the decree, the king this time showed wisdom. Rather than acting rashly, he left the room to consider the matter more carefully before making a decision that he might later regret. It is wise for all people, especially those in authority over other people, to carefully weigh important decisions rather than jumping to conclusions.

### **Haman pleads for his life.**

When the king had left, Haman realized that the king had turned against him and the result could only be harm for Haman. So while the king was gone, Haman appealed to the queen to spare his life.

How interesting and ironic all this is! Just one day earlier all was going well for Haman (so he thought), all had to bow to him and honor him, and his only problem was that one miserable Jew would not bow to him. Now one day later here he was having to prostrate himself before a Jew. One day earlier he had exalted and bragged what a great honor it was to him to attend the queen's banquets. Now one day later he realized that the banquets would lead to his downfall and perhaps even his death. One day earlier he was so confident in his power and position that he thought he could take the lives of all his enemies and decree the death of Mordecai for having crossed him. Now one day later, he must beg a Jew to spare his own life!

And then notice how quickly cruel men can become convinced to believe in the value of mercy! When he was in power and thought no one could stop him, he had no mercy whatever on the Jews. He mercilessly decreed them all to die. He had no mercy whatever on Mordecai but built a gallows to hang him. But now, when he was the one about to fall from favor and perhaps lose his life, suddenly he became a great believer in mercy! What a difference it makes whose foot the shoe is on!

Verse 8

8. When the king returned, what did he see? What did he think?

### **The king suspects Haman of violence against Esther.**

Haman even prostrated himself on Esther's couch as he pled for his life. When the king returned from walking in the garden, he saw Haman and thought he was about to do violence to the queen right in the palace, almost before his very eyes. This, of course, was "the icing on the cake," and angered him to the point of reaching a final verdict against Haman.

The word translated "assault" (NKJV) may otherwise imply rape, but surely the king did not suspect Haman of such a thing at this time and circumstance. However, the king might well suspect Haman of seeking to do violence to Esther for having accused him before the king. He may have thought Haman was trying to force Esther to withdraw her accusation or just that he was seeking vengeance on her in anger.

Again, see how quickly one can fall from favor and the severe consequences when it happened. When Haman had been in favor with the king, the king had interpreted everything he did favorably, even allowing him to decree the death of a group of people without suspecting him of wrong. Now the king's anger leads him to interpret even innocent acts as being evil.

When we have a reputation for doing wrong, people put a bad construction on even our innocent acts. When we have told a lie, people suspect us of lying even when we tell the truth. When we have done violence to others, people fear us even when we have no thoughts of harming them. When a man is known to have committed adultery, his wife and others suspect him of attempting further unfaithfulness anytime he is around another woman. This is why a good reputation is so important. When we have betrayed people's trust, they no longer know when to believe us and when to doubt us.

As the king spoke, his servants covered Haman's face. This evidently was symbolic as a sign of humiliation and condemnation, perhaps even a sign that they recognized Haman stood condemned to death. The servants evidently anticipated from the king's manner and words that Haman was in such disfavor as to be unfit to look upon.

Verse 9,10

9. What information was then given to the king? What decision did he make?

10. Special Assignment: List as many things as you can regarding this outcome that are ironic.

11. Application: What lessons can we learn from the story at this point?

### **The death of Haman**

When a person's evil conduct is exposed, people immediately recall other evil he has done. Every bad act comes to light. In Haman's case, one of the king's eunuchs, named Harbonah, recalled to the king what Haman had intended to do to Mordecai. He recalled that Mordecai had spoken good on the king's behalf (actually had saved his life, as described earlier), but Haman had built a gallows fifty cubits high for the express purpose of hanging this very Mordecai!

Here, even as the king considered what punishment to bring upon Haman, is revealed another conspiracy Haman had committed against another of the king's loyal subjects! Not only had he plotted to annihilate a whole nation of people, which would have included the queen herself, but he had specifically plotted the death of one who had saved the king's life! This was the crowning blow revealing Haman's corruption.

What is more, this situation provided a perfect opportunity for poetic justice against Haman. The king decreed that Haman be hung on the gallows he had built for Mordecai! This is exactly what was done, thereby satisfying the king's anger. So here we have the great and final irony in Haman's life, that he was hung on the very gallows he had built for Mordecai.

### **Lessons from the Jews' victory over Haman:**

Note how, in less than 24 hours, Haman's fate had completely reversed. Surely this shows many lessons to be learned at this point.

1) The power of God's providence – With no miracles, using only natural means including many seemingly insignificant events, using human agents yet without violating any human power to choose, working often in ways no human could have perceived at the time, God accomplished His goal and cared for His people. This perfectly illustrates all elements of providence.

2) The importance of trusting God – Haman apparently had all the advantages and blessings though he had no respect for God's will. Esther and Mordecai trusted God though they had virtually no advantages or reason for hope. Yet those who trusted God prevailed in the end.

3) The justice of God – In the end, evil men are punished and the righteous are exalted. In this case this result occurred in this life, but if it does not come in this life, then it will in eternity.

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