

Esther Lesson 6 – The Tables Start to Turn

Homework for Next Week: Read Esther Chapter 7:1-10

TEXT

Read Esther 6: 1-14

PASSAGE SUMMARY

After Esther's first feast for King Xerxes and Haman, the king was restless and could not sleep. He called on his aides to read from the official record of memorable deeds. It just so happened that the aids chose to recount events that occurred about five years earlier, when Mordecai saved the king's life by exposing an assassination plot. Having forgotten, the king asked how Mordecai was honored for his loyal actions. Upon learning that Mordecai had been overlooked, the king was mortified and took immediate action to rectify the oversight. He ordered that the first official to come into the court should be the one to bestow great honor on Mordecai.

Ironically, Haman had just returned from his home and entered the court to plead with the king to have Mordecai hanged. But before he could make his plea, the king asked him, "What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?" Full of pride with his wealth, position, and exclusive attendance at Esther's feasts, Haman assumed the king wanted to honor him. Haman then concocted an opulent ceremony in which he would wear the king's robe, ride the king's horse, and be led through the city square of Susa by one of the highest nobles, who would cry out, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor." The king enthusiastically endorsed Haman's plan, but directed that Mordecai be the honoree, and Haman be the nobleman that led the horse and cried out the proclamation of honor.

Although devastated, Haman did as the king commanded, but afterward returned home embarrassed and humiliated. Like the previous evening, he recounted the events to his friends and wife Zeresh. They responded with a dire warning to Haman: "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but will surely fall before him." Their discussion was interrupted when the king's servants came and ushered Haman away to attend Esther's second banquet.

STUDY

1. READ

- a. What sequence of events led the king to realize he needed to reward Mordecai?
- b. How was it that Haman became the one who had to bestow honor on Mordecai?
- c. When Haman returned home, how did he react emotionally? How did that differ from the previous night (Esther 5: 10 - 13)?
- d. How did Haman's friend's and wife's advice change from the night before (Esther 5: 14)?

2. MEANING

- a. Although King Xerxes and Haman were the two most powerful men in the Kingdom of Persia, How much planning and direct influence did they exert on events and outcomes in this passage?
- b. What clues in the text indicate that God is at work in the story, directing the reversals of fortune? Do you see any similarities to Jesus at the end of his life?
- c. Why is this passage more about what God is doing than what Esther and Mordecai are doing? What can we learn or be reminded of about God from studying the chapter?

3. APPLY

- a. Looking back, can you recall a time when seemingly random circumstances or a series of events led to a significant impact or turning point in your life? (For example: Think of how you came to faith or had an experience or “aha moment” that shaped you.)
- b. How does this passage challenge or expand your view of how God can work in people’s lives? How can that help you trust God in the midst of distress, bewildering events, and a bleak outlook?
- c. One of our highest inborn and culturally-celebrated values is “being in control”. How do you react to the prospect or reality of “losing control”. What does this reveal to you about your relationship with God? With others? To what extent is being in control a hidden idol in your life?
- d. Haman personifies the old adage, “Pride comes before a fall”. What are some examples that you have experienced or observed?

NOTES

v 6 – The kings of Persia publicly rewarded those who showed great loyalty. Historians record that Xerxes also richly rewarded two military heroes and a loyal subject who saved his brother’s life.

v 7 – Haman presumed he was the intended honoree. Since he was already second in command to Xerxes, and possessed immense wealth, he didn’t ask for a promotion or possessions. Rather, he attempted to bestow on himself the trappings of royalty and admiration for his closeness with the king.

v 13 – This discussion between Haman, his wife and friends, starkly contrasts with his meeting with them just the day before (Esther 5: 10-14).

COMMENTS

This passage recounts the events between Esther's two exclusive banquets for the king and Haman. As one commentator put it, "This is arguably the most ironically comic scene in the entire Bible." ⁽¹⁾ How quickly things can change! The king's insomnia sets in motion a series of events on which the entire direction of the book of Esther – indeed the fate of all the Jews in Persia – starts to turn.

The beginning of this pivot – and there will be much more to come – is a huge reversal of fortunes for both Haman and Mordecai. Mordecai, unjustly slighted but nevertheless loyal, is unexpectedly given a great reward for something he did years before. In contrast, the wildly boastful and vengeful Haman falls instantly from the height of conceit to a deep, crushing humiliation. With razor-sharp irony, Haman is forced to openly give his archenemy the very thing he wanted more than anything else: public respect and adulation.

The magnitude of Haman's fall is further borne out in two conversations with his wife and friends, one day apart. In the first conversation, he boasts of his power, wealth, and prestige, expresses his rage against Mordecai, and is urged by his wife and friends to plot Mordecai's death by public hanging. A day later, with Haman mourning in shame, his wife and friends warn him that his intended victim, Mordecai, will ultimately take him down.

None of the characters (Xerxes, Haman, and Mordecai) planned or could have foreseen the pivotal outcomes. The chain of events seems quite random, but a hidden and greater force was clearly at work. One could almost dub this chapter "God Works in Mysterious Ways". Although He is never explicitly named in the book of Esther, God is moving to accomplish His purposes, weaving together flukey "coincidences", vacillating emotions, good and ill motives, and the broader foibles of human nature.

It is particularly worthwhile to consider this passage – and indeed the entire book of Esther – in light of Paul's great affirmations in the latter half of Romans 8, most notably v. 28: "*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*" An important corollary, also discernible in Esther, is that man's sin cannot thwart God's ultimate purposes.

References

⁽¹⁾ Karen H. Jobes, *Esther – From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life*. The NIV Application Series – 1999, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI.

The Reformation Study Bible, English Standard Version -- 2005, Ligonier Ministries, Lake Mary, FL.