



Disciplers Bible Studies

HAMAN'S PLOT EXPOSED -- CHAPTERS 5-7

INTRODUCTION

Mordecai had promised to gather all the Jews in Shushan (Susa) to fast for Esther for three days before she went before the king. Esther and her attendants would fast also. With the realization that God may have providentially placed her on the throne of Persia for such a time as this (Esther 4:14), Esther humbly sought His will and His strength for the task at hand. She would go before the king, an act which was contrary to the Persian law and which might even result in her immediate execution, but she would go forward supported by the prayers of her people and the providential power of God.

Chapters five through seven represent the turning point in the Book of Esther. The crisis point is reached when Esther appears before the king and is welcomed into his presence with the golden scepter. The events which follow, although they may seem like fortuities, are really the over-ruling power of God working on behalf of His people. Although God's name is never mentioned, it is very clear that He is in control.

Outline of Esther 5-7

- I. Esther's Favorable Reception - Esther 5
- II. Haman's Humiliation - Esther 6
- III. Haman's End - Esther 7

I. Esther's Favorable Reception - Esther 5

- A. Scepter of grace extended - Esther 5:1-3

Esther had prepared herself through fasting and prayer. On the third day she put on her queenly robes and boldly presented herself before the king as he sat on his royal throne. During the three days of fasting, God had not only prepared Esther to go into the presence of the king, but He had also prepared the heart of the king to receive her favorably (Proverbs 21:1). Ahasuerus held out his golden scepter.

Esther knew all too well that approaching the king without being called might mean death for her. In extending the scepter, the king granted her life. God, our King, has extended the scepter to us in Jesus Christ. *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life* (John 3:16). *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need* (Hebrews 4:16).

Not only did the king receive Esther into his presence, he also promised to give her anything she requested, up to half his kingdom. Did it surprise you that the king would be so generous in his offer? *Up to half my kingdom* is probably an idiomatic expression which would assure Esther that she was in favor with the king and that he desired to meet her need, whatever it might be. Believers also have a King who desires to give us whatever we ask of Him within the confines of His will. *Whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it* (John 14:13-14). And again, *If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you* (John 15:7). These verses make it clear that we should take our requests to God, but, at the same time, we must be sure that we are in His will and that we ask according to His will.

- B. Invitation accepted - Esther 5:4-8

Esther's request was that the king and Haman should come to a banquet which she had prepared. Esther had not only been fasting and praying for three days, but she had also stepped out in faith to prepare a dinner for the king. "The days of corporate fasting, accompanied by prayer, had given Esther a wisdom from above and a confidence not her own. She had prepared the meal, believing that the outcome of her daring initiative would be favorable" (Esther, Joyce G. Baldwin).

The king accepted the invitation for both himself and Haman, and they went to the banquet which Esther had prepared. After dinner, as they lingered over the wine, the king again asked Esther to make her request known. Again, he offered her up to half his kingdom. Esther apparently sensed that the time was not yet right to make her petition, so she invited Haman and the king to another banquet which would take place on the following day. Esther had the wisdom not to rush things but to await God's perfect timing. Sometimes patience is a difficult thing, but we will see that Esther's patience will pay off. Do you practice patience in your daily life, or are you often one step ahead of God?

- C. Gallows constructed - Esther 5:9-14

1. Haman's anger - 5:9-10

As Haman left the palace that day, he was on top of the world; that is until he saw Mordecai who had now taken off his sackcloth and returned to the king's gate. When Mordecai refused to acknowledge him, Haman

was filled with rage. The final phrase of verse 9 indicates that Haman was nursing his anger against Mordecai. He restrained himself for the time being, knowing that he would soon get even.

2. Haman's ego - 5:11-13

Upon arriving home, Haman called together his wife and friends and boasted to them of his great riches, his ten sons (Esther 9:7-10), his exalted position in the king's court, and the special attention he had received from the queen. Haman was totally absorbed in his self-importance. If any man ever had an inflated ego, it was Haman. But in spite of all his power, position, and wealth, Haman could not get over Mordecai's refusal to bow down to him. According to Scripture, Haman showed himself to be a fool. In his own self-confidence he raged and boasted (Proverbs 14:16), caring not about understanding, but only about expressing his own heart (Proverbs 18:2).

Haman's wife and friends had a solution to his problem; build a gallows fifty cubits high and suggest to the king that Mordecai be hanged on it. If he had the gallows built quickly and spoke to the king first thing in the morning, the problem of Mordecai would be solved, and Haman would be able to attend Esther's banquet with a joyful heart. This suggestion obviously fed Haman's already inflated ego and added fuel to the fire of his hatred for Mordecai. Haman wasted no time in having the gallows made.

Today, we think of a gallows as a device used for execution by hanging, but from Persian pictures and statues, it is evident that the gallows referred to an impaling stake. A gallows fifty cubits in height would have been as tall as a seven story building. Mordecai's impaled body would have been visible throughout the city of Shushan, even from the king's palace.

II. Haman's Humiliation - Esther 6

A. A sleepless night - Esther 6:1-3

That night as Haman oversaw the construction of the gallows, the king was also awake. Unable to sleep, he ordered one of his servants to bring the book containing the historical records of his reign and read to him from it. Was it by chance that the servant chose the volume containing the record of Mordecai's good deed? Was it by chance that the servant opened to and read the account of Mordecai saving the king's life by reporting the two doorkeepers' conspiracy to kill King Ahasuerus? Or was it the providence of God?

When the king heard the account of what Mordecai had done, his question was, *What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?* The answer was

that nothing had been done for him. Mordecai's loyalty had been overlooked. Five years had passed and he had received no reward for his service to the king.

What are your motives in serving God? Do you desire an earthly reward of position, power, or popularity? Or are your good deeds humbly done for God alone? Jesus said, *When you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly* (Matthew 6:3-4). God will reward service humbly rendered. *For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name* (Hebrews 6:10).

Mordecai's good deed was overlooked by the king. But God will undertake for Mordecai.

B. Honor bestowed - Esther 6:4-11

The king was questioning his servants about who was present in the court just as Haman arrived to ask permission to have Mordecai hanged on the gallows he had prepared. How ironic that Haman had come to ask for the life of Mordecai at the very same moment that the king was making plans to reward him. Of course neither Haman nor the king knew what was on the other's mind. Haman must have been very pleased when the king immediately called him into his presence and asked, *What shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor?*

1. Haman's pride - 6:6b

Haman could not imagine the king honoring anyone but himself! His first thought was, *Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?* Again we see the flagrant display of Haman's egotism and pride. This kind of pride is something which we usually find detestable in others, but sadly tend to tolerate in ourselves. The Bible says, *God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble* (James 4:6 NASB). *Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time* (1 Peter 5:6).

2. Haman's pretension - 6:7-9

With enthusiasm, Haman laid out a plan which would give the one being honored the appearance of being king himself. The honored one would wear a royal robe which had been worn by the king. He would ride upon a royal horse which the king had ridden, and a royal crest would be displayed on the horse's head. One of the king's most noble princes would parade the honored one through the city square shouting, *Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!* Haman wanted to look like a king and be displayed ostentatiously as he rode through the streets so everyone could see. Little

did he imagine that Mordecai, the man he detested, was the one who would receive the accolade.

3. Haman's public humiliation - 6:10-11

It is not hard to imagine Haman's reaction when the king ordered him to do all that he had suggested for Mordecai, the Jew. The blood must have drained from his face and his mouth dropped open in surprise as he struggled to keep his composure and hide the rage which welled up within him. Again we see the irony — the very man who had privately planned Mordecai's death was the one who would publicly honor him. How humiliated Haman must have felt as he carried out the king's order, dressing Mordecai in the robe he wanted to wear, and putting him on the horse he wanted to ride! The words he was forced to speak must have been bitter in his mouth as he broadcast Mordecai's honor in the city square.

C. Doom predicted - Esther 6:12-14

Afterward, Mordecai humbly returned to his place at the king's gate. Haman hurried home as fast as he could to seek the consolation of his wife and friends. His life had taken a terrible turn. He had been publicly disgraced and his pride crushed. Grief stricken and utterly mortified, he covered his head in shame as he slunk home. There, instead of finding the comfort he so desired, he was met with only a prophesy of doom. The very ones who had encouraged him to build the gallows for Mordecai now changed their tune and predicted Haman's downfall. They told Haman that if Mordecai were of Jewish descent, and they knew he was because Haman had formerly referred to him as "*Mordecai, the Jew*" (Esther 5:13), then he would never be able to triumph over him. "Pagan advisors and the pagan wife of an evil man unknowingly stated the central thrust of the book: neither Haman nor any other human can possibly stand against God's Chosen People, the Jewish nation" (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, commentary on "Esther" by John A. Martin).

The early readers of the Book of Esther, the Jews who were scattered throughout the Persian empire, would be encouraged by this to remember God's promises and protection of them in the past. Those who had returned to Judea, as well as those who remained outside the land God had promised, could take heart in the knowledge that God would preserve and protect them as His chosen ones. The existence of the Jewish people and the nation of Israel today is a continuing witness that God is still at work in preserving His people.

If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, then you too are one of His chosen ones. *He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world* (Ephesians 1:4.), and He has promised in His Word to preserve

and protect you. The apostle Paul wrote, *The Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one* (2 Thessalonians 3:3 NASB). The apostle Peter confirmed that we are, *Protected by the power of God* (1 Peter 1:5 NASB). The Book of Esther is therefore an encouragement to all of God's people. As one of His chosen ones, no enemy will prevail against you.

III. Haman's End - Esther 7

Haman had been whisked away from his home by the king's eunuchs and taken to the second banquet which Esther had prepared. After the events which had taken place earlier in the day, Haman had probably lost his enthusiasm about attending. So far it had been one of those days when it would have been best to stay home. For Haman, things would not get better.

A. Haman exposed - Esther 7:1-6

The king was most anxious to hear Esther's petition. After dinner, as they lingered over their wine, he again asked what her request was. Again he offered her up to half his kingdom. Esther had now found the courage to express her plea to the king. Perhaps the knowledge of Mordecai's honor that morning had given her the added boldness she needed. In any case, she was quite diplomatic in her appeal. She addressed her husband, *O king*, and let him know that she desired to win his favor and please him. This conveyed to him that she would never ask for anything which would be contrary to his best interest. She then quickly stated her plea for her own life and the lives of her people. In that instant, Esther revealed to the king the secret which she had kept so long — that she was a Jew. Whether this came as a shock to Ahasuerus, we do not know, but surely it was to Haman. Can you picture the look of shock and horror which must have come over his face in learning that the Queen of Persia was one of those he had sentenced to death in his evil decree?

Esther recounted all the details of the decree which had been issued against the Jews. The fact that she and her people had been sold referred to the bribe Haman had offered the king (Esther 3:9). The words *destroyed*, *killed*, and *annihilated* are the exact words of the decree. To further show her submission to the king, Esther told him that if the Jews had simply been sold into slavery, she never would have troubled him at all. Notice that Esther had not yet made any reference to Haman by name.

Esther had no way of knowing how the king would react. Would he fly into a rage and banish her from his sight forever as he had done to Vashti? If she escaped his anger, would he even consider granting her request? The king did not become angry with Esther, but the tone of his next question shows his underlying agitation. He

wanted to know, who would dare presume in his heart to do such a thing? The words were definitely not a good omen for Haman. When Esther replied, *The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!* he was filled with terror. The words of his wife and advisors must have rung in his ears, *you will not prevailbut will surely fall (Esther 6:13)*. Haman's doom was sealed.

B. Haman executed - Esther 7:7-10

The king was visibly angry by now. He arose and left the room. Was he stunned to realize what Haman had done in issuing the decree with the royal signet ring? Did he comprehend that he was an accessory before the fact to the proposed decimation of the Jews? How did he feel to know that he had inadvertently sentenced his own wife to death?

As the king paced his palace gardens pondering the situation, Haman went to Esther to plead for his life. "The man who without a twinge of remorse could devote a nation to destruction is in dire distress at the thought of himself losing life or liberty" (Joshua, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, H. A. Ironside). In his desperation, he fell at Esther's feet where she was reclining on her couch. (It was the Persian custom to recline on couches while dining. See Esther 1:6) His only hope was to turn on his charm and beg the queen for his life. But at that very moment, the king returned to find Haman in a most objectionable position. It would have been the height of the breach of Persian etiquette for any man to go near the queen. But Haman, in his distress, was falling all over her. The king accused him of assaulting the queen. As the words left his mouth, the attendants covered Haman's face. He was a condemned man, no longer worthy to look upon the king or queen or even to see the light of day.

Harbonah, one of the king's seven eunuchs who had been sent to fetch Vashti on that fateful day nine years earlier, now pointed out to the king the gallows which Haman had built for Mordecai. Harbonah apparently knew all about Haman's plan to kill Mordecai. Perhaps that very morning when Haman had gone to the palace to speak to the king, he had boasted to the king's eunuchs about how he would get rid of Mordecai. Now the king could see the gallows from the palace window.

He ordered that Haman be hung on it. And he was! *The righteous is delivered from trouble, and it comes to the wicked instead (Proverbs 11:8)*. Not only did God deliver His chosen ones, but He brought upon the enemy the same fate which had been planned for their destruction.

It was mentioned in Lesson 2 (page 3) that Haman, as the enemy of the Jews, is a picture or a "type" (see Note below) of the Antichrist, the last great enemy of God and His people. He surely had the spirit of the Antichrist! As Haman plotted and nearly succeeded in annihilating God's people, so will the Antichrist in the last days. But as surely as Haman's end came by the decree of the king, so will the end of the Antichrist come by the mouth of the King of kings (Revelation 19:20-21). The apostle John has told us that the spirit of the Antichrist is now working in the world through those who refuse to honor God and confess His Son (1 John 2:18-19 and 4:3). It is a serious thing to defy God and go against His plan. It is a serious thing to harbor bitterness, anger, and pride in the spirit of Antichrist, in the face of the living God. *God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap (Galatians 6:7)*.

Note: In the Scriptures, a "type" is a person, place, thing, or institution in the Old Testament which looks ahead to and prefigures a corresponding person, place, thing, or institution in the New Testament. Types are merely a shadow of things to come, not the express image of those things (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 8:5 and 10:1). They are pictures or object lessons by which God teaches His redemptive plan.

Applications

1. Psalm 7:15 and 16 says that if you dig a pit for your enemy, you will fall into the ditch which you have made and that the trouble you have planned for your enemy will return upon your own head. Someone has said that this makes an enemy a very costly thing, a luxury that is too expensive to maintain. Are you indulging yourself by having an enemy? Will you confess this to God and ask Him to set your heart right?

2. Ahasuerus was a man ruled by his emotions. He was overly influenced by the words and actions of others. In what ways do you allow your emotions to rule you? How do you let other people and their actions affect you? Will you look to the Lord Jesus Christ for your satisfaction rather than relying upon other people, situations, or your feelings?

3. Are you sure of God's protective power in your life because you know that you are one of His chosen ones (Ephesians 1:4)? If you are not sure, will you speak to your discussion leader and ask for a copy of our Disciplers' "Confidence Letter?"



Disciplers Bible Studies

GOD RESCUES HIS PEOPLE -- CHAPTERS 8-10

INTRODUCTION

Esther had exposed Haman's evil plot to the king and he had disposed of Haman, but the Jews of the Persian Empire were still in danger. Something had to be done about Haman's decree or the Jewish people would be annihilated by their enemies. The problem was that the decree which had been sent out was irrevocable according to the law of the Medes and the Persians. Having been written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet ring, it was a royal law and could not be changed or annulled. (Daniel 6:8 and Esther 8:8). It seemed like an impossible situation. But that was not a problem for God. God specializes in the impossible! What seems to human eyes to be impossible or unchangeable is not difficult for God. The Scriptures tell us that by the power of God, Abraham's wife, Sarah, conceived and gave birth to a son when she was very old, past the age of child-bearing (Genesis 18:14 and 21:2). When Moses and the Israelites were trapped between the advancing Egyptian armies and the Red Sea, God divided the waters so they were able to go through the midst of the sea and cross over on dry land (Exodus 14:22). In Israel's battle against the Amorites, God listened to Joshua's voice and fought for Israel, causing the sun to stand still in the sky until the battle was won (Joshua 10:13; Habakkuk 3:11). The prophet Jeremiah observed, *Ah, Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You* (Jeremiah 32:17). *Jesus told His disciples, With God all things are possible* (Matthew 19:26).

Have you ever found yourself up against an impossible situation? Have you ever hesitated to pray because you felt something was impossible? You will take courage from God's working in this impossible situation in the Book of Esther. You will see that the impossible is no match for the empowering wisdom and working of God. A decree issued by a man, even though he may be the most powerful man in the world, cannot stand against the power of God.

In these last three chapters, we will see how God rescued His people from an impossible situation and witness the joy and light His salvation brought to their lives. Even to this day the Jews remember each year the day on which Haman's evil decree was subverted and their sorrow was turned to joy and their mourning into a holiday.

Outline of Esther 8-10

- I. Edict of Encouragement for the Jews - Esther 8
- II. Extermination of the Jews' Enemies - Esther 9
- III. Epilogue - Esther 10

I. Edict of Encouragement for the Jews - Esther 8

- A. Property and power given to Mordecai - Esther 8:1-2

Part of Haman's evil plan had been to confiscate the property of the Jews (Esther 3:13), but his property was taken away instead. On the day King Ahasuerus had Haman hanged, he also took Haman's property and gave it to Esther. She in turn appointed Mordecai to oversee it. In addition, when the king found out that Mordecai was Esther's blood relative, he took his signet ring which Haman had used to sanction the killing of the Jews (Esther 3:10) and gave it to Mordecai. Thus, Mordecai was given both the property and the power which Haman had formerly possessed.

- B. Plea of Esther heard - Esther 8:3-8

Clearly, king's sympathies were now with Esther and her people, but still something needed to be done to save the lives of all the Jews in the provinces of Persia. Esther again gathered her courage. She approached the throne of the king with humility and tears. She was the Queen of Persia, the most exalted woman in the land, but she identified herself with her people and was willing to risk all she had in order to save them. Once more Ahasuerus held out his golden scepter and Esther presented her request to him in a most diplomatic way. She was very careful to make her intercession for her people with courteous respect and without placing any blame for the decree upon the king. What she asked was that something might be written to revoke the letters which had been devised by Haman.

King Ahasuerus gently reminded Esther of what he had already done for her. Haman had been hanged and his house given to her. However, he was powerless to revoke a decree which had been written in his name and sealed with his signet ring. From Daniel chapter six we learn that the laws of the Medes and Persians could not be altered. Since it was impossible for Ahasuerus to repeal the law, he gave Esther and Mordecai permission to write their own decree and seal it with his signet ring.

C. Proclamation sent out - Esther 8:9-17

The king's scribes were called to prepare a new decree.

1. Time and places - 8:9

It was now the twenty-third day of the the third month, the month of Sivan, of the year 474 B.C., just over two months since Haman's decree had gone out. More than eight months still remained for the Jews to prepare to defend themselves against those who might attack them.

The new decree, dictated by Mordecai, was sent to the Jews, the satraps, the governors, and the princes of all one hundred and twenty-seven Persian provinces from India to Ethiopia. It was written in the script and the language of each province and also in the script and language of the Jews. Haman's decree had likewise been sent to each province in its own language and script, but Haman's decree had not been translated into Hebrew for the Jews.

2. Contents - 8:10-13

The new decree was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with his signet ring. It gave the Jews the right to assemble together to protect their lives, the right to kill anyone who might attack them, the right to plunder the possessions of those they destroyed, and the right to do all of this on one day only — the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar (the day which Haman's decree specified for destruction of the Jews.) The purpose of the new decree was to enable the Jews to be ready to avenge themselves on their enemies. Instead of being defenseless against those who would destroy them, they would be allowed to retaliate. Joyce G. Baldwin in her commentary *Esther* notes, "This was justice, not revenge. It was vindication, not vengeance."

3. Couriers - 8:10b and 14

The decree was sent out by couriers riding on the swiftest royal horses. They delivered to the Jews the good news that they did not need to die, but could defend themselves and destroy their enemies. One commentator has pointed out that Christians are the King's couriers in the world today and that we are sent out to proclaim to a world under condemnation that doomed sinners need not die. We are to hasten to proclaim this good news to the ends of the earth in order that people might not perish but have everlasting life.

4. Reaction - 8:15-17

After the issuing of the first decree, Haman had sat

down to drink with the king (Esther 3:15). After the new decree was issued, Mordecai went out into the presence of the people. His clothing of royal Persian colors and crown of gold announced his new position as "prime minister" in place of Haman. The word crown (*teret*) in verse 15 is a different Hebrew word than the one used to refer to the royal crown ("*keter*") in Esther 1:11 and 2:17. Mordecai's crown was more likely a turban or headband such as a coronet.

After Haman's decree the city had been bewildered (Esther 3:15), but the reaction to the new decree was quite different. The whole city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad.

a. Light and gladness, joy and honor - 8:16

The Jews throughout the land rejoiced. The new decree and the promotion of Mordecai were a clear indication that the king's sympathies were with them. Although God's name is still not mentioned, it is clear that He had undertaken for them and brought them out of the darkness of condemnation and into His light of gladness, joy, and honor. In the same way, God has undertaken for believers to bring us out of darkness and into the light of His love.

In the Old Testament, God's Law disclosed that the wages of sin is death. The apostle Paul confirmed this in his letter to the Romans (Romans 6:23), adding that *all have sinned* (Romans 3:23). Sin and death entered the world through Adam and spread to all men (Romans 5:12). Therefore all are under condemnation. Because He is just, God would not revoke His Law, but He was so willing to save sinners from death that He sent His own Son to make salvation possible. (See Ezekiel 18:23; John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9.) The apostle Paul wrote, *the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death* (Romans 8:2).

b. Proselytes - 8:17

It was obvious to all the people of the land that the Jews were being protected by their God. It was also obvious that the king of Persia favored the Jews. As a result many people sided with the Jews and even became proselytes to the Jewish religion. It is interesting to note that this is the only place in the Old Testament that makes reference to people of other races becoming Jews.

II. Extermination of Enemies - Esther 9

A. Reversal - Esther 9:1-4

The thirteenth day of the twelfth month arrived and the enemies of the Jews went against them, hoping to