



Esther - Chapter Five

II Esther 3:1-9:17 - Main Action (continues)

Summary of Chapter Five

Following three days of fasting, Esther went unannounced to see the king and he welcomed her into his presence. She requested that he and Haman should attend a banquet that Esther had prepared for them and the king summoned Haman to join them. During the banquet Esther requested that the two men should join her for a further banquet the following day and the king agreed.

Haman left the banquet in high spirits but was infuriated to notice that Mordecai did not bow down as he passed. Haman continued on his journey home, called his wife and friends to him and recounted what great honour he was held in, sharing in special banquet with the king and invited again tomorrow. His joy was only soured by the actions of Mordecai, so his wife suggested he should have a gallows built and then to suggest to the king the following day that Mordecai should be hanged.

II.c Esther 5:1-8 - Esther's Banquet

Esther is favourably received by the king and prepares to expose Haman. Esther takes advantage of her renewed influence with the king to begin to implement her own plan to defeat Haman's plot to have all the Jews killed.

¹ On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, opposite the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne inside the palace opposite the entrance to the palace. ² As soon as the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won his favour and he held out to her the golden sceptre that was in his hand. Then Esther approached and touched the top of the sceptre.

Esther 5:1-2

The third day is at the end of the three days of fasting: <<Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish>> (Esther 4:16).

Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace.

Esther stood where Ahasuerus could see her and waited for him to either reject or receive her. This was a very tense moment for she was risking her life. Esther showed courage in her willingness to appear before the king without being summoned by him. This took special courage because King Ahasuerus did not have a good reputation for treating his queens well and he usually held rigidly to court protocols.

The beauty of Esther in her royal robes is reminiscent of a description once given to Jerusalem before its fall from grace: <<You were adorned with gold and silver, while your clothing was of fine linen, rich fabric, and embroidered cloth. You had choice flour and honey and oil for food. You grew exceedingly beautiful, fit to be a queen>> (Ezekiel 16:13).

The purpose of the golden sceptre was explained in the previous chapter: <<All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—all alike are to be put to death. Only if the king holds out the golden sceptre to someone, may that person live. I myself have not been called to come in to the king for thirty days>> (Esther 4:11).

³ The king said to her, 'What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom.'

Esther 5:3

It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom. The Greek historian Herodotus describes Xerxes, i.e. Ahasuerus, as making such an offer, although on a different occasion. Esther rightly understands it as a traditional, grand gesture rather than one the king expects to be taken seriously. King Herod Antipas made a similar offer to the daughter of Herodias when she danced before him: <<And he solemnly swore to her, 'Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom'>> (Mark 6:23).

King Belshazzar of Babylon once made a similar offer to Daniel. In his case it was a genuine offer to make Daniel even greater than he already was: <<But I have heard that you can give interpretations and solve problems. Now if you are able to read the writing and tell me its interpretation, you shall be

clothed in purple, have a chain of gold around your neck, and rank third in the kingdom>> (Daniel 5:16). However, Daniel declined the gift and interpreted the writing on the wall for nothing, knowing that it spelt the end for the king and his entire empire.

⁴ Then Esther said, 'If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to a banquet that I have prepared for the king.' ⁵ Then the king said, 'Bring Haman quickly, so that we may do as Esther desires.' So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

Esther 5:4-5

If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to a banquet that I have prepared for the king. Esther had carefully planned what she would do if she was received favourably. Esther also showed tact by not blurting out her ultimate request immediately. She wanted to first win the king's approval and confidence in her - and she wanted Haman at the banquet to ultimately expose his wickedness. By inviting Haman too, she flattered him and set him up for a colossal fall.

⁶ While they were drinking wine, the king said to Esther, 'What is your petition? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.' ⁷ Then Esther said, 'This is my petition and request: ⁸ If I have won the king's favour, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfil my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet that I will prepare for them, and then I will do as the king has said.'

Esther 5:6-8

What is your petition? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled. King Ahasuerus repeated this offer to Queen Esther. It was more of a proverbial expression than a literal offer for anything up to half of the kingdom.

The banquet that I will prepare is another feast on the following day. Esther bided her time just as Haman had done. She put Haman further off guard, making sure the king is in the best possible mood before revealing what she really wanted.

Esther put off the request for one more day, promising to reveal her petition at a second banquet on the following day. It may have been that Esther could not find the courage to present her request, and used the successive banquets as a delaying tactic, or more likely that she used the king's love of banquets to prepare his heart for her request. Charles Spurgeon comments, "Some of us are very unaccountable, but on that woman's unaccountable silence far more was hanging than appears at first sight. Doubtless she longed to bring out her

secret, but the words came not. God was in it; it was not the right time to speak, and therefore she was led to put off her disclosure. I dare say she regretted it, and wondered when she should be able to come to the point, but the Lord knew best.”

II.d Esther 5:9-14 - Haman Plans to Have Mordecai Hanged

A dangerous development arises as Haman prepares to hang Mordecai. Events may be moving too swiftly for Mordecai to be saved by Esther’s plan.

⁹ Haman went out that day happy and in good spirits. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king’s gate, and observed that he neither rose nor trembled before him, he was infuriated with Mordecai; ¹⁰ nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home. Then he sent and called for his friends and his wife Zeresh, ¹¹ and Haman recounted to them the splendour of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honoured him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and the ministers of the king. ¹² Haman added, ‘Even Queen Esther let no one but myself come with the king to the banquet that she prepared. Tomorrow also I am invited by her, together with the king. ¹³ Yet all this does me no good so long as I see the Jew Mordecai sitting at the king’s gate.’

Esther 5:9-13

Haman was both happy and in good spirits, and infuriated with Mordecai. Haman was elated at how he has been treated by the king and queen, but again becomes incensed by Mordecai’s refusal to bow to him. He will not be able to fully enjoy the second banquet until he has dealt with Mordecai.

He was infuriated with Mordecai. Miserable Haman! Honoured by both the king and queen of Persia, the disapproval of one man made him feel worthless. This is an accurate description of how empty the rewards of this world are. Haman’s deep seated insecurities and need to be honoured by everybody meant that he could never be truly content in life; God meant this hunger for acceptance in each person to be ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ - because Christians are accepted in the Beloved: <<*He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved*>> (Ephesians 1:5-6), accepted before God because of who they are in Jesus.

Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home. This is remarkable evidence of the hand of God. God would not allow the fury of Haman to take action until all the proper pieces were set in place to ultimately defeat his plan.

Yet all this does me no good so long as I see the Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate. Haman's problem was not Mordecai, it was the emptiness in his own heart. Even if he solved the 'Mordecai problem,' it would not fill the emptiness in his heart.

¹⁴ Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, 'Let a gallows fifty cubits high be made, and in the morning tell the king to have Mordecai hanged on it; then go with the king to the banquet in good spirits.' This advice pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made.

Esther 5:14

There was a gallows in Esther 2:23, but this is another gallows to be erected especially for hanging Mordecai. Its enormous height of fifty cubits, i.e. 75 feet or 23 m, reflects Haman's 'towering' rage; it was his clear intention to make a public spectacle of Mordecai.

For these friends of Haman, it was not enough to just punish Mordecai's people, for the planned genocide against the Jews was already set in motion, or merely to kill Mordecai. They wanted Haman to ask for a public, humiliating execution of Mordecai on gallows fifty cubits high.

The gallows mentioned here was not for hanging a victim but for violently killing and displaying the victim. The method of execution was a pointed stake set upright in the ground and the culprit was then taken, placed on the sharp point and then pulled down by his legs until the stake went into his anal passage, up through the body and out through the neck. This was one of the most barbaric methods of execution ever devised in which revenge and cruelty were more important than justice. The culprit often lived for a considerable time in excruciating agony although not generally as long as they often would by crucifixion.

Tell the king. Zeresh assumes that Haman's influence is now so great that he can virtually order the king to hang Mordecai. Mordecai's fate now seems to depend on whose influence over King Ahasuerus will prevail – Haman's or Esther's.

This advice pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made. Haman, who is just as much under the influence of his wife and friends as Ahasuerus is under the influence of Haman and Esther, unwittingly builds the means for his own demise.

The destructive and distorting power of hatred should never be underestimated. The same irrational, violent hatred that made Haman want to see Mordecai so painfully put to death is the same irrational, violent hatred that made man want to hang Jesus on Calvary's Cross.