



Esther - Chapter Seven

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

Summary of Chapter Seven

Despite his despair and humiliation Haman is summoned to attend the banquet with the king prepared for them by Esther. The king again requests that Esther make her petition and she asks him to spare the lives of her and her people from the decree made by Haman. The king was furious with Haman for threatening the life of his queen in this way and went out into the garden to calm his mood. In the meantime Haman threw himself on Esther's couch asking for her mercy. At this moment the king returned, believed that Haman was assaulting Esther and had him immediately taken out and executed on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordecai.

II.f Esther 6:14-7:10 - Haman's Downfall and Mordecai's Advancement

This is the dramatic heart of the story, where Esther risks all to save her people.

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Esther 6:14

While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and hurried Haman off to the banquet that Esther had prepared. It seems that in his distress and humiliation Haman may have even forgotten he was due to dine with the king and queen. Officials had to be sent to collect him and his mood could not have been so different from his joy at attending a similar feast on the previous day.

^{7:1} So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. ² On the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, 'What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.'

³ Then Queen Esther answered, ‘If I have won your favour, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me – that is my petition – and the lives of my people – that is my request. ⁴ For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king.’

Esther 7:1-4

Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled. King Ahasuerus repeated this offer to Queen Esther given to her in Esther 5:3 and 5:6 as well. It was more of a proverbial expression than a literal offer for anything up to half of the kingdom. Refer also to the comments made in Chapter 5.

If it pleases the king, let my life be given me. Esther, even when she finally made her request, showed great tact. She did not immediately identify herself as a Jew, targeted for massacre - just as Haman had also hidden the identity of the group he targeted when he made his request: <<*Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, ‘There is a certain people scattered and separated among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king’s laws, so that it is not appropriate for the king to tolerate them’*>> (Esther 3:8).

That is my petition, that is my request. Esther also showed wisdom in how she framed her request. She appealed on a personal basis, knowing that she had never done anything but please the king.

I and my people. Esther reveals that she is a Jew and that Ahasuerus has been tricked into ordering the death of the queen he loves.

We have been sold. Haman had bought the king’s agreement to his plan by offering a great deal of silver to be placed in the king’s treasury as a result of his decree to kill the Jews; refer to Esther 3:9.

But no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king. With this exaggerated comparison, Esther, like Haman, appeals to the king’s self-interest. If he reduced the Jews to slavery, he would at least have the benefit of their free labour. By killing them, he will lose a valuable asset.

⁵ Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, ‘Who is he, and where is he, who has presumed to do this?’

Esther 7:5

Who is he, and where is he, who has presumed to do this? Ahasuerus perhaps should have known that it was actually he himself who authorised such a plan. He

was the one who gave authorisation to Haman to carry out this plot in Esther 3:10-11, although he did it in ignorance.

Of course, ignorance is no excuse. The king could easily have asked the identity of these 'certain people' when Haman had made the proposition. His officials could then have advised him that they were a hard working people, loyal to the king and a people who paid their taxes: <<Jesus said to them, 'Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's.' And they were utterly amazed at him>> (Mark 12:17). He would then have been in a better position to make the decision.

⁶ Esther said, 'A foe and enemy, this wicked Haman!' Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.

Esther 7:6

A foe and enemy, this wicked Haman! Esther exposed the truth about Haman - that he was not a faithful servant of the king; he was instead an adversary and enemy, more interested in his own fame and status than the benefit of the king.

Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen. Haman never imagined that Esther was a Jew; now he stood before the king being rightly accused of plotting the murder of the king's wife. Now the wisdom of Esther's strange request to invite Haman to these banquets can be seen; it maximised the impact upon both the king and upon Haman himself.

⁷ The king rose from the feast in wrath and went into the palace garden, but Haman stayed to beg his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that the king had determined to destroy him. ⁸ When the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman had thrown himself on the couch where Esther was reclining; and the king said, 'Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?' As the words left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman's face.

Esther 7:7-8

The king went into the palace garden. The king was filled with wrath; probably because he now realised that Haman had duped him in getting this decree to kill the Jews put into effect. Ahasuerus withdraws briefly to compose himself. Refer to Esther 1:5 for comments on palace courtyards and gardens.

Haman had thrown himself on the couch. Haman was probably kneeling, perhaps with his hands or arms on the couch to seek mercy from Esther, but the king's perception was distorted by his anger, taking Haman's move as an assault on Queen Esther.

Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house? For all of Haman's pleading, he only got himself into deeper trouble - now he was accused of personally assaulting Esther!

A Jewish writing says that the angel Gabriel pushed Haman so he fell on Esther's couch just as King Ahasuerus was coming back into the room. However, this is purely legend, for God does not need to act in this way for his will to be done.

They covered Haman's face. Covering the head of a condemned prisoner is a custom well known in both ancient and modern times.

⁹ Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, 'Look, the very gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, stands at Haman's house, fifty cubits high.' And the king said, 'Hang him on that.'¹⁰ So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the anger of the king abated.

Esther 7:9-10

Hang him on that. As in the case of the men executed in Esther 2:23, Haman was probably not hanged with a rope around his neck, but was instead impaled on a huge stake in what was an ancient precursor of crucifixion. This is a gruesome piece of poetic justice that completes the 'fall' Haman's wife had predicted; refer to Esther 5:13 and 6:13 and the associated comments.

Haman found his end on the same instrument he had intended for the death of Mordecai; he was caught in his own trap against Mordecai. God often works this way and people should reflect on the prayer of the psalmist: <<*See how they conceive evil, and are pregnant with mischief, and bring forth lies. They make a pit, digging it out, and fall into the hole that they have made. Their mischief returns upon their own heads, and on their own heads their violence descends*>> (Psalm 7:14-16). Perhaps the greatest example of this was when Satan thought that he had won the battle by getting the crowd to crucify Jesus, but the Cross turned out to be the instrument of his utter defeat.

So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the anger of the king abated. The death of a substitute satisfied the wrath of the king. In the case of Mordecai and Haman, it was the guilty dying in the place of the innocent; in the case of humanity and Jesus, it is a matter of the innocent dying in the place of the guilty.