

## VII. Panic of Haman, 6:1-14

### A. Appreciation

TEXT: 6:1-5

- 1 On that night could not the king sleep; and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles, and they were read before the king.
- 2 And it was found written, that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains, of those that kept the threshold, who had sought to lay hands on the king Ahasuerus.
- 3 And the king said, What honor and dignity hath been bestowed on Mordecai for this? Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, There is nothing done for him.
- 4 And the king said, Who is in the court? Now Haman was come into the outward court of the king's house, to speak unto the king to hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him.
- 5 And the king's servants said unto him, Behold, Haman standeth in the court. And the king said, Let him come in.

### Today's English Version, 6:1-5

That same night the king could not get to sleep, so he had the official records of the empire brought and read to him. The part they read included the account of how Mordecai had uncovered a plot to assassinate the king—the plot made by Bigthana and Teresh, the two palace eunuchs who had guarded the king's rooms. The king asked, "How much have we honored and rewarded Mordecai for this?"

His servants answered, "Nothing has been done for him."

"Are any of my officials in the palace?" the king asked.

Now Haman had just entered the courtyard; he had come to ask the king to have Mordecai hanged on the gallows that was now ready. So the servants answered, "Haman is here, waiting to see you."

"Show him in," said the king.

## COMMENTS

v. 1-3 *Insomnia*: That particular night (the same night Haman's friends advised him to petition the king) is indicated by the demonstrative pronoun *hahu'* in the Hebrew. The demonstrative pronoun also seems to emphasize that this was not mere chance, but the active providence of God. "It is among the objects of the writer of Esther to show how the smallest circumstances of life, those most generally regarded as left to chance, work together for good to such as deserve well, and for evil to such as deserve evil." (*Pulpit Commentary*). The authors of the Septuagint apparently were persuaded of Divine providence here for they translated, "But the Lord removed sleep from the king that night . . ." A turning-point in the destinies of both Haman and Mordecai pivoted on what might appear to some as a chance circumstance of a king's insomnia. The Hebrew text reads literally, ". . . the king's sleep fled away." The Hebrew verb *nigera'im* is an imperfect participle and should be translated, ". . . they kept on reading them before the king." He probably expected the monotonous intonation of the reader's voices to lull him to sleep. But his insomnia was providential.

And suddenly they read the official notation that Mordecai had been the informer of a plot to assassinate the king. That startled the king and for the moment he forgot his insomnia. Immediately the king asked what was not only a natural question, inasmuch as it had been his life which had been saved, but one that was also predicated upon Persian law. According to Herodotus (8:85) those who had done great deeds of honor and benefit to the king of Persia had their names written on a special roll of honor and they were esteemed as a special class of people. It would be a serious violation of Persian protocol and law and a great dishonor to the emperor should he not honor someone who had saved his life. So the emperor asks what the record shows about the honor done to Mordecai. The readers reply with a surprising, "Nothing!" It is difficult to guess why such a gross error was ever allowed to happen. Perhaps the emperor had given the order for Mordecai's reward when the event took place and fully expected one of his subordinates to take care of it, but due to some administrative mistake (or perhaps some prejudice against Mordecai) it had never been done.

v. 4-5 *Indecision*: Xerxes, unable to decide for himself, seeks counsel from any official who might be standing in the court of the palace. Xerxes certainly knew how to reward faithful service and give gifts (cf. 3:1, 11; 5:3, 6). Why does he now seek counsel on how to reward Mordecai? The only suitable answer is that the circumstances of the night are somehow under the providential guidance of Jehovah. For, who should be standing waiting in the court of the palace but Haman, archenemy of Mordecai. In fact, the very reason for Haman's presence in the court in the wee hours of the morning, before dawn, was to get the emperor's permission to impale Mordecai on the "tree" that he had prepared for the insubordinate Jew. Haman was obsessed with his rage against Mordecai. It drove him to stay awake all night pacing the floor in the court of the palace, hoping he would have the first audience with the king upon his arising. Haman's obsession to destroy Mordecai trapped him in circumstances which led to his own destruction. This is the way God has ordered the moral structure of His creation. Man has the freedom to choose personal salvation or personal damnation (cf. Rom. 1:18-32). Man can give himself to evil, be obsessed with it, and choose to have it eternally; or he may give himself to righteousness and have it eternally (cf. Rom. 6:12-23). Mordecai chose a righteous life and did good in saving the emperor's life; Haman chose evil and attempted to destroy Mordecai's life. Mordecai was protected and exalted by the hand of Providence; Haman was thwarted and destroyed by the same Hand.

## B. Arrogance

TEXT: 6:6-9

- 6 So Haman came in. And the king said unto him, What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor? Now Haman said in his heart, To whom would the king delight to do honor more than to myself?
- 7 And Haman said unto the king, For the man whom the king delighteth to honor,

- 8 let royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon; and on the head of which a crown royal is set:
- 9 and let the apparel and the horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man therewith whom the king delighteth to honor, and cause him to ride on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honor.

### Today's English Version, 6:6-9

So Haman came in, and the king said to him, "There is someone I wish very much to honor. What should I do for this man?"

Haman thought to himself, "Now who could the king want to honor so much? Me, of course."

So he answered the king, "Have royal robes brought for this man—robes that you yourself wear. Have a royal ornament put on your own horse. Then have one of your highest noblemen dress the man in these robes and lead him, mounted on the horse, through the city square. Have the nobleman announce as they go: 'See how the king rewards a man he wishes to honor!'"

### COMMENTS

v. 6 *Immodesty*: Haman was a vain man. He was the kind of man who felt insecure unless he was constantly being honored and flattered. He had to have it. But he could not handle flattery. He no doubt thought his promotion (3:1) and his invitation to the queen's banquet (5:4) were deserved. His pride made him totally unaware of the possibility that anyone else might deserve to be honored by the emperor. The world is still plagued with a few people like Haman. Regretfully, some of them occasionally surface within the Kingdom of God in spite of Paul's admonition, "give preference to one another in honor . . ." (Rom. 12:10). There is a

difference between pride and proper self-worth. It is false humility when we pretend we do not have a capacity that we do have. Proper self-acceptance does not require one to pretend that he has no capabilities; it only requires that he remember that he did not create his capabilities himself. Real humility walks the fine line between self-abnegation and self-acceptance. That is the line Haman could not walk. He could not humble himself and so he could not accept himself unless he was being constantly applauded and honored by others. Immodesty is the result of a twisted vanity. Pride and vanity come from a fundamental insecurity. Immodest behavior and dress are compensations for a vain insecurity.

Haman rationalized that since he had been so deservedly honored in the last day or two, then the emperor must be preparing to honor him further. In Haman's mind there could be no one else whom the emperor would so delight in honoring.

v. 7-9 *Imperiousness*: Haman suggests the highest honors he can imagine; he suggests honors befitting an emperor. Such honors as Haman suggests were rarely given by Persian monarchs. They are not totally without parallel, however, as the writings of Plutarch and Herodotus testify. For anyone to wear royal apparel previously worn by the emperor was, under ordinary circumstances, a violation of Persian law. But Herodotus (7:17) points out that the emperor might, in certain circumstances, allow it. Apparently Haman was audacious enough to suggest that the one to be honored should even ride upon the king's very own, favorite horse. The horse was adorned with some type of royal ornament to signify it was the mount which belonged specifically to the emperor and was ridden by him only. Ancient *bas reliefs* of the Assyrians show king's horses with tall pointed ornaments like royal turbans on their heads. It is doubtful that the "crown royal" is the crown the emperor himself wore since Xerxes would scarcely have allowed such a travesty to be made of the imperial symbol of sovereignty. Actually, the relative pronoun *'asher* in the Hebrew text indicates that it is the crown of the horse rather than the crown of the emperor.

Haman's final suggestion was that one of the emperor's highest

ranking noblemen should be made valet for the one about to be honored. This nobleman-valet will assist the honored one in properly dressing in the royal robes and he will also go in front of the honored one in a procession through the streets of the great capital city proclaiming that the one sitting on the emperor's horse has been signally honored by the emperor himself. A similar kind of honor was bestowed upon Joseph by the Pharaoh of Egypt (cf. Gen. 41:41-43).

There was probably some expression on the emperor's face indicating that Haman's suggestions were pleasing him. Haman's heart was probably beating rapidly as he anticipated the excitement which would soon be his as he rode through the streets on the emperor's horse.

### C. Abasement

TEXT: 6:10-14

- 10 Then the king said to Haman, Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken.
- 11 Then took Haman the apparel and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and caused him to ride through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor.
- 12 And Mordecai came again to the king's gate. But Haman hasted to his house, mourning and having his head covered.
- 13 And Haman recounted unto Zeresh his wife and all his friends every thing that had befallen him. Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him, If Mordecai, before whom thou hast begun to fall, be of the seed of the Jews, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him.
- 14 While they were yet talking with him, came the king's chamberlains, and hasted to bring Haman unto the banquet that Esther had prepared.

## Today's English Version, 6:10-14

Then the king said to Haman, "Hurry and get the robes and the horse, and provide these honors for Mordecai the Jew. Do everything for him that you have suggested. You will find him sitting at the entrance of the palace."

So Haman got the robes and the horse, and he put the robes on Mordecai. Mordecai got on the horse, and Haman led him through the city square, announcing to the people as they went: "See how the king rewards a man he wishes to honor!"

Mordecai then went back to the palace entrance while Haman hurried home, covering his face in embarrassment. He told his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then she and those wise friends of his told him, "You are beginning to lose power to Mordecai. He is a Jew, and you cannot overcome him. He will certainly defeat you." While they were still talking, the palace eunuchs arrived in a hurry to take Haman to Esther's banquet.

## COMMENTS

v. 10-11 *Humiliation*: What a shock for Haman to hear the emperor's order that the highest honors imaginable are to be given to Mordecai, the man he most hated. Haman had not only to see that these great honors were done for Mordecai, he must do them himself! How humiliating! Many of the noblemen of the emperor's court no doubt knew of Haman's contempt for the Jew, Mordecai. Now Haman is about to be publicly abased. It was a bitter degradation but inescapable. To disobey the emperor after he has spent a sleepless night worrying about rectifying a serious default of royal Persian protocol would undoubtedly mean immediate death for Haman. He was instructed to make all haste to carry out every detail suggested. Nothing was to be omitted. He must be Mordecai's valet; he must go in front of Mordecai throughout the streets of the great capital city proclaiming the honor of the Jew who rides upon the emperor's own

horse, dressed in the emperor's own robes.

v. 12-14 *Hysteria*: It is worth noticing that Mordecai, after the parade, put off the royal robes and returned to his lowly place of service at the "king's gate." Most men would have been so intoxicated with the excitement they would have sought more recognition or, at least, promotion. It is interesting, in retrospect, that Mordecai, after saving the emperor's life, did not seek reward or recognition. This sharpens even more the contrast in the characters of Haman and Mordecai.

Haman, mortified and ashamed, fled to his own home expecting to find some solace or security there. He was so destroyed that he put a covering over his face so he would not be recognized as he fled to his house. He had no sooner told the sordid details of his humiliation than his counselors and his wife advised him that Mordecai, the Jew, would ultimately cause his complete fall from power. These "wise men" were probably Haman's official advisors. The TEV translation has chosen irony to characterize the "wise" men, as if they were self-professed wise men. We prefer to assume they were more like the Chaldeans of the book of Daniel — official advisors to kings and noblemen.

Why would these Persians conclude that Mordecai's being a Jew would make it impossible for Haman to prevail in his struggle against him? As a matter of fact, Haman had already secured an edict from the emperor that all Jews are to be massacred (cf. 3:10ff). Perhaps these advisors and Haman's wife were wise enough to see that since Mordecai had been singularly honored (given the highest honors) by Xerxes himself, it would be unreasonable to allow the man so gloriously honored to be massacred. The LXX translated the last phrase of verse 13, ". . . and thou wilt not be able to withstand him, for the living God is with him." Some commentators think the miraculous nature of Mordecai's victorious exaltation over Haman impressed the truth upon Haman's advisors and wife that the Jews must be under special divine protection. Such an impression is not altogether improbable. Pharaoh's magicians were compelled to explain: "This is the finger of God . . ." and the Egyptians cried: "Let us flee before Israel, for the Lord fighteth for them" (Ex. 8:19; 19:25). Jewish

history and scriptures were well known by the “wise men” of the cultures of Mesopotamia and Persia. So the warnings of Haman’s wise men and his wife are based on more than a fear of the shrewdness and expertise of the Jews. The very fact that the Jewish people still existed in spite of all the captivities and persecutions which they had endured must have impressed many thinking people with the conviction that there was some higher power providentially caring for them.

These predictions of Haman’s “fall” before Mordecai must have pierced Haman’s heart with great trepidation. Insecurity breeds paranoia. Insecure people persistently fantasize that others are determinedly “out to get them.” Haman was probably near hysteria from his paranoia. His “friends” certainly did not give him any relief.

*We may learn the following lessons from this chapter:*

1. The good that we do, though unrewarded at first, will always have its rewards.
2. Evil has a way of obsessing the whole man.
3. Flattery is dangerous; it usually blinds the one being flattered.
4. Inordinate pride is self-destroying.

## CHAPTER SIX

### REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did the king ask about the honor done for Mordecai?
2. Why was Haman standing in the court of the palace at such an unusual time?
3. Why did the king ask Haman’s advise on how to honor the one who saved the king’s life?
4. Why did Haman suggest such great honors? How great were the honors he suggested?
5. Why didn’t Haman refuse to carry out the order to do these honors for Mordecai?
6. Why did Haman’s counselors and wife say he would fall before Mordecai?