

VIII. Plea of Esther, 7:1-10

A. Massacre Disclosed

TEXT: 7:1-6

- 1 So the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen.
- 2 And the king said again unto Esther on the second day at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition, queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed.
- 3 Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favor in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request:
- 4 for we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my peace, although the adversary could not have compensated for the king's damage.
- 5 Then spake the king Ahasuerus and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?
- 6 And Esther said, An adversary and an enemy, even this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and queen.

Today's English Version, 7:1-6

And so the king and Haman went to eat with Esther for a second time. Over the wine the king asked her again, "Now, Queen Esther, what do you want? Tell me and you shall have it. I'll even give you half the empire."

Queen Esther answered, "If it please Your Majesty to grant my humble request, my wish is that I may live and that my people may live. My people and I have been sold for slaughter. If it were nothing more serious than being sold into slavery, I would have kept quiet and not bothered you about it; but we are about to be destroyed — exterminated!"

Then King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, "Who dares to do such a thing? Where is this man?"

Esther answered, "Our enemy, our persecutor, is this evil man Haman!"

COMMENTS

v. 1-2 *Promise*: The king was anxious to hear Esther's request. She had piqued his curiosity by postponing what was her heart's desire. Now the king repeats his magnanimous promise, ". . . even to the half of my kingdom it shall be performed . . ." for the *third* time (cf. 5:3; 5:8). Note that the king addressed her as "queen" probably tacitly inviting her to make her request great and promising the certain granting of the request.

v. 3-4 *Petition*: In spite of the urgency of the crisis and in spite of every good reason for Esther to be livid with anger at Haman, she controls her emotions and produces the proper protocol in addressing the king. Esther's petition is verbalized in only four Hebrew words, *napheshi bishe'elathi, ve'ammi bebaqqashathi*; translated into English, "my life at my petition, and my people at my request." These are poignant to modern Jews. They have been preserved in Jewish traditional liturgy called the Selichoth. The Selichoth are penitential prayers in the form of liturgical poems recited on all fast days and days of special intercessions and during the "penitential season" which begins before Rosh Ha-Shanah (Jewish New Year) and concludes with the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). Esther showed great diplomatic skill in pleading for her own life first. The revelation that the life of his "favorite" was in danger would rouse any protective instinct the king might possess. Who would dare threaten the life of his queen? Then, perhaps for the first time, the king learned that Esther was a Jewess. She must now acknowledge her genetic origin if she is to secure the salvation of her kinsmen.

She does not hesitate; she does not mince words. She tells the king plainly that she and her people have been "sold" to be slaughtered. Is there an inference in her use of the word "sold" that the king himself is implicated in the massacre about to be executed? — perhaps! What she most certainly does is tabulate the great loss in human resources to the king should this genocide be carried out. Apparently the Jews, even though a people in exile, and technically "prisoners of war," were not looked upon as prisoners but were given privileges of freedom practically equal

to Persian citizenship so long as they did not seek to disobey the laws of Persia. Esther indicates that she, at least, might have accepted a change of social status to that of bondage or slavery for her people. However, she is quick to point out, Haman's ten thousand talents of silver (3:9) would not be able to pay for the economic, intellectual, political, ethical loss to the Persian empire should the status of the Jews be changed to slave. The Jews evidently were making great contributions to the Persian society in all the areas mentioned above so long as they were given rights nearly equal to those of native Persians.

The plight of the Jews is not slavery, but imminent annihilation. Now the king realizes he is not only about to lose his queen, his favorite wife, he is also about to suffer irreparable loss of human resources to his empire if he allows this slaughter to take place.

v. 5-6 *Perpetrator*: Xerxes immediately asks, "Who is he . . ." The Hebrew phrase is literally, "... who is filled in his heart to do so?" He knows very well that Haman secured the imperial decree to exterminate the Jews. There may have been a subtle attempt to make himself appear free of any involvement in the matter. Esther could have justifiably said, "Thou art the man!" He was involved. He accepted the money from Haman and put his royal seal to the decree. But Esther was interested more in saving her people than placing blame. Besides, the king had been told a false story by Haman alleging Jewish insurrection.

Esther put the blame where it really should be — Haman. Her accusation was that Haman was a *tzar* (Hebrew for adversary, persecutor, vexer) and an *'ayav* (Hebrew for enemy) and a *ra'a'* (Hebrew for evil-doer, wicked-one). Esther does not have one word to say in favor of Haman. There were no mitigating circumstances to soften the enormity of his evil intention. His motives were completely wicked.

Haman was afraid. Well he might be. Now he was the condemned, and the Jews his condemners. Now it was his life in the balance. Now he knows how the Jews felt when they heard the royal edict for their massacre — terrified! The justice of the One whose very Nature is Absolute Justice is about to be manifested.

Someday, just as surely as that day of Haman, all the injustices and persecutions and slayings of all the faithful believers of God and His Son, Jesus Christ, will be corrected and vindicated. Final, complete eternal, absolute justice will be executed by the Judge of all the earth. The enemies of God and His people will receive what they have imposed upon God's precious saints. The destruction of Haman and the salvation of the Jewish people is simply another historical demonstration of how the Creator intends to consummate all of history — with justice!

B. Minister Doomed

TEXT: 7:7-10

- 7 And the king arose in his wrath from the banquet of wine and went into the palace garden: and Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen; for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king.
- 8 Then the king returned out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine; and Haman was fallen upon the couch whereon Esther was. Then said the king, Will he even force the queen before me in the house? As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.
- 9 Then said Harbonah, one of the chamberlains that were before the king, Behold also, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman hath made for Mordecai, who spake good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman. And the king said, Hang him thereon.
- 10 So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified.

Today's English Version, 7:7-10

The king got up in a fury, left the room, and went outside to the palace gardens. Haman could see that the king was determined to

punish him for this, so he stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life. He had just thrown himself down on Esther's couch to beg for mercy, when the king came back into the room from the gardens. Seeing this, the king cried out, "Is this man going to rape the queen right here in front of me, in my own palace?"

The king had no sooner said this than the eunuchs covered Haman's head. Then one of them, who was named Harbonah, said, "Haman even went so far as to build a gallows at his house so that he could hang Mordecai, who saved Your Majesty's life. And it's seventy-five feet tall!"

"Hang Haman on it!" the king commanded.

So Haman was hanged on the gallows that he had built for Mordecai. Then the king's anger cooled down.

COMMENTS

v. 7-8 *Faux Pas*: The text pictures the king rising with suddenness and anger from the banquet. The banquet is called *mishetteh* of *yayin* or "drinking bout of wine." In the feasts of Mesopotamian aristocracy food was not the main course; the time was mainly spent in drinking and eating desserts (cf. Herodotus 1:133; and Daniel 1:5 — "rich food" RSV; Dan. 5:1-4). The king strode angrily into the palace garden. He had been duped by this Haman who lied to him about the Jews being disobedient to Persian laws (cf. 3:8). He knew his queen was aware he had been duped. Not only so, but he had been tricked into issuing an order to kill his beloved Esther! The king probably felt like killing Haman himself, but he bolted out into the palace garden to cool his anger and consider what he would do about his dilemma. He has issued a Persian law; the law of the Persians cannot be revoked; Haman has tricked him to order the death of his queen along with all the Jews; but Haman is second in the kingdom — his "chief of staff" as it were. What to do?

Meanwhile Haman began discretely at first to request that the queen spare his life. The Hebrew word is *baqesh* and is not quite as intense as the TEV "beg." Since, however, discrete requesting

did not move Esther, Haman proceeds to “fall” upon Esther’s couch and implore her to spare his life. Haman knew the king well enough to interpret his actions. When the king rose angrily and strode into the palace garden, Haman knew he was in trouble.

Haman committed a serious *faux pas* (error, blunder, mistake) when he fell upon Esther’s feasting couch. Apparently his only intention was to beg Esther to spare his life. He had no sooner fallen down beside her than the king entered the room having returned from the garden. The king’s evaluation of what he saw is described by the Hebrew word *likebosh* which means to “subdue by conquest.” Actually there is another Hebrew word, *shagal* (cf. Isa. 13:16), which is nearer the English word *rape*. Did the king think Haman was trying to rape her as the TEV translates, or did he think Haman was trying to assault her as if to kill her and thus force her to grant him his life? We think the latter more likely describes Haman’s action. Whether the king innocently or deliberately misinterpreted Haman’s posture on Esther’s couch we may only conjecture. Some think he could plainly see that Haman was not beating or choking the queen and therefore the king deliberately misinterpreted Haman’s posture to justify his decision to kill Haman. Whatever the case, the king’s mighty eunuchs took it as a signal that Haman was a doomed man and that he should be taken into custody to await execution. According to Roman historians Livy (1:26) and Cicero (4:13) and some of the Greek historians, it was customary to place a hood or covering over the face of a condemned man who was no longer worthy to see the light. The Greeks and Romans must have copied the practice from the Persians.

v. 9-10 *Finished*: Harbonah was one of the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of the king (1:10) and was one of those sent to bring in Vashti. He apparently was well informed of Haman’s plot to have Mordecai executed because he knew all about the “tree” 50 cubits high upon which Mordecai was to be impaled. This is the first time we are told that Haman had put the “tree” in the courtyard of his own house. This information adds a touch of sadistic barbarity to the characterization of Haman. He wanted to personally witness the gruesome death of his enemy

Mordecai. Harbonah also knew that Mordecai had “spoken good” toward the king in the past. He knew Mordecai’s persecution by Haman was not justified.

The king cried out immediately, “Hang him thereon!” Haman did not get a trial by a jury of his peers. There were no other witnesses called to confirm his guilt — none were needed. Esther had described him for what he was and the king knew it was true for the king himself had been deceived by the wicked man. Harbonah’s information indicated Haman had a special grudge against Mordecai and had intended to “enjoy” executing Mordecai before the date set by the decree to exterminate the Jews.

But what Haman had planned for an innocent man, turned out to be his own fate — and that justifiably. The writer of Proverbs said, “Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him (Prov. 26:27).” How true! Listen also to the words of the Psalmist, “I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.” (Psa. 37:35-37).

We may learn the following lessons from this chapter:

1. A nation’s best resources are industrious, obedient citizens.
2. Money cannot replace people.
3. Evil and wicked people who would unjustly harm others must be identified.
4. Our actions are not always what they appear to be to those who see them through eyes of anger.
5. The wickedness that men do and the good that men do is often observed by those least expected to have observed it. (e.g. Harbonah)
6. “Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein . . .”

CHAPTER SEVEN

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How many times did the king promise Esther “half the kingdom”?
2. Where, in Jewish traditional literature, is the request of Esther used today?
3. What is Esther admitting when she asks for the lives of “her” people?
4. Why wouldn’t Haman’s ten thousand talents compensate for the king’s damage?
5. If the king knew already who had asked to slaughter the Jews, why did he ask Esther who the culprit was?
6. Why did the king leave the banquet when Esther named Haman?
7. How did the king interpret Haman’s being on Esther’s couch?
8. Why did Haman have the “gallows” erected in his own house?