



LIVING IN A HOSTILE WORLD  
Studies in Ezra and Esther  
Lesson 7  
(Esther Lesson 4)

**MISSION IMPOSSIBLE**  
**ESTHER 5-7**

*This story of Esther's appeal to the king and its aftermath is one of the great pieces of literature. The story is masterfully told, keeping the reader in suspense with unexpected twists and turns in the plot. Suddenly, the entire course of events is reversed by the king, so that wicked Haman is hanged on the very gallows he had intended for Mordecai, and the man whom he sought to kill is elevated to take his place. It is not just a great story magnificently told, but a story with important lessons for us to learn.*

– Robert Definbaugh, Esther: A Study of Divine Providence

**I. ESTHER PREPARES TO EXPOSE HAMAN'S PLOT ESTHER 5:1-14**

**A. Esther's Impossible Task**

**1. Esther had to break the Persian law for which the penalty was death.**

Approaching the king without his approval was a crime for which death was the instant verdict.

**2. Esther had to confess that she had deceived the king.**

Esther, like Haman, had deceived the king. She has reached her position as queen by keeping the fact that she is a Jew a secret. (Esther's appeal to the king could easily cause him to be angry with her for her deception).

**3. Esther was attempting to convince the king to invalidate an irrevocable law.**

The decree was to be executed as a law of the Persians and the Medes, an irreversible law (see 1:19; 3:9-10; 8:8).

**4. Esther is attempting a plan which could embarrass the king.**

For the king to deal with Haman as the situation requires, the king will have to admit he has foolishly exalted Haman to power and position and that he has been duped by Haman.

**5. Esther opposed Haman, one of the most powerful persons on earth at the time.**

Haman was acting as prime minister of the Empire. Thus the king gave him quite a bit of power, which enabled him to pass laws the king had not even read. To appeal to the king now, Esther has to go against the powerful Haman.

**B. Esther's Appearance before the King 5:1-4**

Attention now builds in the story as Esther prepares to approach the king. Can you imagine her nervousness as she prepares just the right dress, shoes, perfume and royal robes?

Perhaps the king saw her nervousness, or admired her determination. He seems impressed again with her beauty and lowers the golden scepter indicating

that he has allowed her to enter into his presence. He knows she is there with a petition and so alleviates her reticence by promising her that she can ask for anything. "Up to half the kingdom" is a hyperbole, an Oriental exaggeration. It was common for kings to make extravagant offers at such moments as a compliment, without ever expecting to be taken literally. (Remember the embarrassment of King Herod when Herodias' daughter pushes him to his limits (Mark 6:22ff).

The question we have to ask is why does she not come directly to the point? He has offered her practically anything that he may grant. Why does she waste time over a dinner party? Twice, in fact. Why these tactics? This is surely not a crisis of confidence. Is she simply indulging her feminine wiles? Is she waiting for the opportune moment?

In addition to heightening the dramatic tension for the reader, the writer is telling us what actually took place. We need to keep in mind that the request she is about to make would be most difficult to grant. It would mean an embarrassment for the King. It would take the revoking (at least the getting around) of an irrevocable law. Though we don't know all the reasons for Esther's tactics, it is clear that she is attempting to produce the circumstances which will ensure the desired outcome to her request. It seems that by introducing Haman to the scene she may be provoking the king's jealousy. At the very least her ploy seems to be to make the king uncomfortable with Haman's presence.

When invited to a banquet, the king accepts. He knows that she has a really important request to make.

### **C. The First Banquet 5:4-8**

Note that in the first banquet Esther says she has prepared a banquet for the king (verse four) then the second invitation says she is preparing a banquet for both the king and Haman. Esther seems to be plotting to make Haman appear overly arrogant in the king's eyes.

I am sure she carefully chose the king's favorite dishes. After five years in the royal harem Esther understood well the strategic role of a banquet. In fact there have been four banquets in chapters 1 and 2. Festive meals were occasions for drinking. The author makes much of the use of wine, here and elsewhere in the book.

As they were drinking their wine, the king again asked Esther what she wanted him to do for her and gives her the same assurance that he would grant anything she asks. And again Esther delays. Esther asks the king to attend with Haman another of her banquets the following night and implies that she will then make her petition known.

### **D. Haman Is Mortified because of Mordecai 5:9-14**

Haman leaves the banquet for home, his head swollen with pride. But on his way out of the palace he must exit through the king's gate, and there of course is Mordecai. In spite of the fact that Haman has been invited with the king to the Queen's banquets, Mordecai is unimpressed. He does not stand. He does not even seem to acknowledge the presence of the great Haman.

Haman's home is his palace. There his wife and friends gladly stroke his ego. But his boast of the "*glory of his riches*" (5:11) is dampened by Mordecai's refusal to acknowledge him. What a disgusting exhibition of vanity and pride. The old saying seems true: "*whom the gods would destroy they first make mad.*" Surely

"*pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall;*" and "*when pride comes, then comes shame; but with the humble is wisdom*" (Proverbs 16:18 and 11:2).

Haman's family and friends have what seems to be a simple solution -- do away with Mordecai. Mordecai was to be a kind of "firstfruits" of the Jews that were to be slaughtered. Haman sees the advice as brilliant and immediately sets out to have a huge gallows constructed. 50 cubits would be about 75 feet.

## II. THE KING HONORS MORDECAI ESTHER 6:1-14

### A. Sleepless in Susa 6:1-3

Reading of records of the chronic goals (probably equivalent to the Congressional record) would have usually put the king back to sleep, as it surely had on many occasions. But on this occasion it was found that Mordecai had kept the king from being killed.

Scofield comments:

*Here is a remarkable instance of the veiled providential control of God over circumstances of human history. Upon the king's insomnia, humanly speaking, were hinged the survival of the chosen nation, the fulfillment of prophecy, the coming of the Redeemer, and therefore the whole work of redemption. Yet the outcome was never in doubt; for God was in control, making the most trivial of events work together for Haman's defeat and Israel's preservation. The New Scofield Reference Bible*

Since the king normally rewarded people who did him a special service, his oversight of Mordecai's favor led him to move speedily to rectify the oversight.

### B. Haman's Recommendation 6:4-10

The fool that he is, Haman is totally unaware of Esther's trap. And now the king himself becomes a part of Haman's downfall. There is a comic element to the pride in Haman that only underscores how completely divorced from reality he really is.

The twofold dinner invitation with a 24 hour interval between allows time for Haman's ego to come to full flower. Haman is indeed the perfect fool. At the very height of what he sees as his glory, he devises the means by which he himself will be executed.

When the king speaks of "*the man whom the king delights to honor*" vain Haman thinks that he is meant. J. G. McConnell writes, "*(His words in verse 6 would make a perfect pantomime stage-whisper.)*" – Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther, Daily Bible Study Series

Haman wants to be as much like the king as possible. At least he wanted people to see him that way. This was a common ancient method of honoring a person (cf. Genesis 41:39-45; 1 Samuel 18:4; 1 Kings 1:33).

The crest on the horse's head seems to have been some arrangement of horse's hair to form a topknot between the ears on which was placed something similar to the royal crown.

Verse 10 seems to indicate that the king knew by now that Mordecai was a Jew. Although the writer does not say that Ahasuerus understood that the Holocaust of Haman was against the Jews, it seems incredible that he would issue such a decree without finding out to whom it was directed.

Haman hastened to the banquet. He did not want to be late. This is probably the meaning of verse 14 rather than any indication of his reluctance.

And now you have the hilarious turnaround of circumstances. The king takes Haman at his word and orders that he so honor Mordecai. And Haman dutifully does so. Haman's wife and friends have a sudden insight that proves deadly to Haman - they express the inevitable ascendancy of the Jewish people as seen in past events.

### III. HAMAN'S FALL ESTHER 7:1-10

While they are drinking the subject of Esther's request is brought up again by the king. His eagerness to hear her request may partly be because of curiosity, and partly because of his awareness that something serious is troubling her. He again assures Esther that he will grant her petition, even before he knows what she will ask.

Haman of course thinks he has the king in his pocket and Esther as a new ally. Esther confides that he she and her people are to be annihilated and that the enemy could never compensate for the King's loss. The King seems (incredibly) not to know that Haman was speaking of the Jews and that they are condemned to death by Haman's Law.

The king's anger is now aroused. He wants to know the name and where this evil person can be found. One can almost feel Haman's shock as he hears Esther name him as the wicked one. Here is Esther's real test of courage. To reveal Haman's evil she must also tell the king that she belongs to the people who are sentenced to death. Her only hope for herself and her people is in the revelation of the abject evil of Haman. She refers to the sordid financial transaction that accompanied the decree and claims that Haman is an enemy not only of the Jews but of the king himself.

And now Haman is doomed. The fatal blow has been struck and the demise of Haman now quickly ensues.

Ahasuerus seems dazed for the moment as he begins to realize that Haman has obtained his royal consent for this genocide. Haman knows that it is useless to plead with the king in his anger so he turns to Queen Esther. And just here there is another of those strange providential coincidences of the book. In his desperation Haman oversteps the bounds of both court etiquette and ordinary decency and throws himself up on the divan where the queen is reclining. At this very moment the king returns and catches Haman falling upon the bed where Esther is reclining. And again in one of those revelations of the thought life of the characters, the author has the king wondering out loud whether Haman would force the queen in front of him and his very house. The words had no more left the king's mouth when the guards covered Haman's face. Haman was hanged upon the very gallows he had prepared for Mordecai.

Scripture tells us that such a twist has occurred before in God's providential dealings. Daniel, himself saved by Almighty Power from lion's jaws, watches his accusers cast into the den and destroyed. David wrote, "*Behold the wicked brings forth iniquity. Yes, he conceives trouble and brings forth falsehood. He made a pit and dug it out, and has fallen into the ditch which he made. His trouble shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down on his own crown*" (Psalm 7:14-16).

## CONCLUSION AND APPLICATION

Esther leaves us an example of courage accompanied up by her determination, use of her femininity and a God-given cleverness.

Haman reminds us of the proverbial fool. But his fate also reminds us of those who are a thorn to the righteous - the "prosperous wicked." Psalms 73 discusses this as well as Psalm 37. The Psalms pictures the innocent as too often suffering in the world, while the wicked enjoy its fatness. But appearances can be deceiving. The true condition of the wicked is one of imminent danger and real horror. Haman seems to have reached the very pinnacle of the Persian Empire, and yet he was not satisfied. The reader knows that Haman never could have succeeded because God ultimately is with His chosen people.

Esther teaches us that events conspire to bring about justice in the end. Even if God's hand is unseen, it still is bringing about His perfect will. The world is full of "Hamans" who seem to prosper in their wickedness. But God has the last laugh. The story of Haman once again keeps us from accusing God of injustice.

The book reminds us of the certainty of divine retribution. Our contemporary idiom says, "*what goes around comes around.*" In the long run, those who resist God's will submit to Him. Haman, in setting out to destroy the Jews, not only opposed himself to the Abrahamic covenant but set himself against God. When Haman was forced to "glorify" Mordecai at the king's command, he illustrated for us the way in which every rebel against God will have to glorify God.

Esther also teaches us that salvation is of the Lord. In spite of the sins of the Jews, God spared them from destruction. The Jews were spared not because anyone in the story was righteous, but because God was faithful to His covenant with the Jews.

The story is a great illustration of the gospel. That which seemed to be meant for destruction became the means of salvation. Our salvation comes through the death, burial and resurrection of our Lord Christ. That which seemed to be the worst event in history became the most glorious event of all time. It is through His death that we have life. At the cross He bore the punishment for all our sins. In putting His Son to death, and then raising Him from the dead, God made it possible for us to have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. We live by dying in Christ. Salvation comes through apparent destruction.

Just as the king spared the Jews for Esther's sake, God loves and spares us for Christ's sake. The Lord Jesus Christ, whom the Father loves, approaches the Father and intercedes for us.