

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Esther Chapters 5-7 – The World that left God out. A distant king, a proud official and a brave queen.

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Introduction.

In the book of Esther there are no references to God at all. However, it is clear from a careful reading of the book that God is working behind the scenes to accomplish His purpose for His people in the kingdom of Ahasuerus. At the end of chapter 3 a decree had been issued and sent throughout the kingdom to kill all Jews which resulted in the city of Susa to be thrown into confusion. Chapter 4 tells of the impact on the Jews in that city and the actions that Mordecai took, clothing himself in sackcloth, a sign of mourning. At the end of chapter 4 Esther came to a decision as to when she will seek an audience with the king, but not before she fasts for three days and nights. Esther requested that Mordecai and all the Jews in the city of Susa fast also.

Chapter 5 - Esther seeks audience with the king.

Let us read chapter 5 vv.1-4.

“On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king’s palace, in front of the king’s quarters, while the king was sitting on his royal throne inside the throne room opposite the entrance to the palace. And when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won favour in his sight, and he held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. Then Esther approached and touched the tip of the sceptre. And 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.” And Esther said, “If it please the king, let the king and Haman come today to a feast that I have prepared for the king.””

As we open chapter 5, Esther had made herself ready to meet with the king and proceeds to the inner court, joining others who are seeking a favour or judgment from the king. A person needed to be desperate to do this because if the king does not grant an audience, then at the end of the day that person would be put to death. Esther knew this but this was the only way to meet the king. The talk title mentions a distant king. We would have thought that Esther as Queen would be able to leave her royal apartments and see the king at any time. But this is not so, the king seems to have distanced himself from all contact except his most trusted servants. The Queen is not included. This isolation may be traced back to the occasion when two of the king’s servants, Bigthan and Teresh, plotted to kill the king, chapter 2 vv.21-23.

“In those days, as Mordecai was sitting at the king’s gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king’s eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. And this came to the knowledge of Mordecai, and he told it to Queen Esther, and Esther

told the king in the name of Mordecai. When the affair was investigated and found to be so, the men were both hanged on the gallows. And it was recorded in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.”

Mordecai had overheard the plot, and he informed Esther to alert the king to the danger. So it is not surprising that Ahasuerus had become a distant king who was afraid of any more attempts on his life.

However, all goes well for Esther the golden sceptre is held out to her that she may approach the king and make her request known. We know from chapter 2:15-18 that the king loved Esther more than anyone else.

“When the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his own daughter, to go into the king, she asked for nothing except what Hegai the king’s eunuch, who had charge of the women, advised. Now Esther was winning favour in the eyes of all who saw her. And when Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus into his royal palace in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign, the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. Then the king gave a great feast for all his officials and servants; it was Esther’s feast. He also granted a remission of taxes to the provinces and gave gifts with royal generosity.”

So, when the king asks for her request, he sets the limit to half of his kingdom. Whether this was to be taken literally or not, Esther’s request was very modest. “Let the king and Haman come to a feast that I have prepared for the king.”

The first feast.

Let us read vv.5-8.

“Then the king said, “Bring Haman quickly, so that we may do as Esther has asked.” So the king and Haman came to the feast that Esther had prepared. And as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king said to Esther, “What is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.” Then Esther answered, “My wish and my request is: If I have found favour in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my wish and fulfil my request, let the king and Haman come to the feast that I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said.””

The king ordered Haman to come quickly so that they can both attend the feast. Afterwards as they are drinking wine the king raises the question as to why Esther had invited them to a feast. However, Esther does not immediately raise her concern but asks the king and Haman to come again the next day to another feast with the promise that she will then make her request known. Again we can see God’s hand working behind the scenes. Haman needed to plan his own downfall, although he does not know it, before the Jews can be rescued.

Pride and hatred.

Let us read vv.9-14.

“And Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king’s gate, that he neither rose nor

trembled before him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai. Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and brought his friends and his wife Zeresh. 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 servants of the king. Then Haman said, "Even Queen Esther let no one come with the king to the feast she prepared. And tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king. Yet all this is worth nothing to me, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." 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 upon it. Then go joyfully with the king to the feast." This idea pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made."

Haman was feeling incredibly pleased with himself as he left the palace to go home until he passed Mordecai sitting in his usual place at the king's gate. Now Mordecai would not stand and bow, which enraged Haman but he controlled himself and continued on home. Haman's hatred for Mordecai started in chapter 3:2-6, and when he discovered that he was a Jew, he then hatched a plan to destroy all Jews throughout the kingdom of Ahasuerus.

"And all the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage. Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you transgress the king's command?" And when they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai's words would stand, for he had told them that he was a Jew. And when Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage to him, Haman was filled with fury. But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus."

Gaining the approval of the king, based on a few lies, the plan was put into place to happen later in the year. So Haman was content for the moment to wait for the execution of what he thought was a well-thought-out-plan that could not fail. Again the long lead time was part of God being in control behind the scenes.

Upon arriving home Haman was in a good mood, so he invited friends around to boast of what had happened that day. Haman enlarged upon his boasting by speaking of the greatness of his riches, his family, and the promotions he had received from the king before mentioning the invitation to a feast with the king and Queen, a feast prepared by Queen Esther. However, for Haman there was a fly in the ointment; and it was Mordecai who would not give him the honour he expected.

We now see God working again behind the scenes when Haman's wife, Zeresh, and his friends suggest he makes gallows seventy-five feet high then tell the king on the morrow about Mordecai not giving him due honour and seek the king's permission to hang Mordecai on the gallows. Then Haman would be able to go happily to the feast with the king.

Chapter 6 - A sleepless night.

Let us read vv.1-3.

"On that night the king could not sleep. And he gave orders to bring the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles, and they were read before

the king. And it was found written how Mordecai had told about Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, and who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. And the king said, "What honour or distinction has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" The king's young men who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him."

It seems strange that after spending a day with Queen Esther at her feast that the king has a sleepless night. I am sure it was not indigestion! but God's hand upon the king. He orders his servants to bring the book of memorable deeds and to read it to him. We are often told that if you have a sleepless night to count sheep. For a Christian it might be better to either sing silently our well-known hymns or to repeat Scripture verses. However, for the king it was the chronicles of good deeds done. Eventually the reading gets to the two men who plotted against the king. The king wants to know if Mordecai has been rewarded. Amazingly nothing had been done for Mordecai to acknowledge his good service to the king.

The king looks for a counsellor, vv.4-9.

Let us read these verses.

"And the king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace to speak to the king about having Mordecai hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for him. And the king's young men told him, "Haman is there, standing in the court." And the king said, "Let him come in." So Haman came in, and the king said to him, "What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honour?" And Haman said to himself, "Whom would the king delight to honour more than me?" And Haman said to the king, "For the man whom the king delights to honour, let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and the horse that the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown is set. And let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble officials. Let them dress the man whom the king delights to honour and let them lead him on the horse through the square of the city, proclaiming before him: 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honour.'"

Haman came early to the palace to seek permission to hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had built. So Haman was early to the court of the palace waiting for an audience with the king. At the same time the king was looking for a counsellor, so he asks his trusted servants, "Who is in the court?" The king is told that Haman is in the court, and he is duly summoned. The king then puts the question to Haman, "What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honour?" Haman's mind must have gone into overdrive at that point. He has forgotten for the moment why he had come so early to see the king. His pride takes over as he believes the king can only be speaking about himself. So in vv.7-9 he describes to the king how such a person should be honoured.

"For the man whom the king delights to honour, let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and the horse that the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown is set. And let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble officials. Let them dress the man whom the king delights to honour and let them lead him on the horse through the square of the city, proclaiming before him: 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honour.'"

For Haman, in his pride, he wanted to have himself displayed in a very prominent way so that the citizens of Susa would see him as the king's favourite counsellor exalted above all other servants of the king.

Pride before a fall, vv.10-11.

Let us read these two verses.

“Then the king said to Haman, “Hurry; take the robes and the horse, as you have said, and do so to Mordecai the Jew who sits at the king’s gate. Leave out nothing that you have mentioned.” So Haman took the robes and the horse, and he dressed Mordecai and led him through the square of the city, proclaiming before him, “Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honour.””

When the king next spoke it was not as Haman had expected. Haman’s enemy is the man the king had in mind. Haman must do exactly as he described to the king leaving nothing out and he must act like a lowly servant leading the horse around the city and proclaiming, “Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honour.” We may imagine that Haman’s face was not a happy one. Mordecai may have been puzzled over what was happening considering he had been sitting in sackcloth at the king’s gate.

After the horse ride, vv.12-14.

Let us read these verses.

“Then Mordecai returned to the king’s gate. But Haman hurried to his house, mourning and with his head covered. And Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise men and his wife Zeresh said to him, “If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but will surely fall before him.” While they were yet talking with him, the king’s eunuchs arrived and hurried to bring Haman to the feast that Esther had prepared.”

Mordecai returns to his post sitting at the king's gate waiting to see the outcome of Esther's actions. But for Haman, he hurries home to tell his wife and friends about the sad turn of events. Haman's wise men and his wife Zeresh have no comforting words for Haman but only outline in plain language his downfall. Haman had no time to reflect upon this as servants from the king arrive to bring him with haste to the palace and the feast so that the king and Queen Esther were not kept waiting.

Chapter 7 - Revelations at the second feast, vv.1-6.

Let us read these verses.

“So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. And on the second day, as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king again said to Esther, “What is your wish, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.” Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have found favour in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request. 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 been silent, for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king.” Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, “Who is he, and where is he, who has dared to do this?” And Esther said, “A foe and enemy! This

wicked Haman!” Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.”

This is the second day of feasting and as at the first it is followed by drinking wine. Again the king asks the Queen about her request. He once again reiterates up to half of the kingdom will be granted. This is again the equivalent of saying that there is no reasonable limit but not literally to half of the kingdom. Esther starts with offering her life and the life of her people as part of her request. The reason being that they had been sold to be destroyed, killed, and annihilated. It could not have been stated any more forcibly. This is balanced by Esther saying, “If we had been sold as slaves, I would have remained silent.” Then Esther touches upon the revenue that would be lost to the king. Having said all this Esther now has the full attention of the king, who exclaims! “Who is he, and where is he, who has dared to do this?” Until now Haman had no idea of the link between Esther and the Jews because it is not until Esther states, “A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!” At this point Haman became terrified before the king and the Queen. If the parading of Mordecai through the streets of Susa was not enough Haman could now see his actions against the Jews were returning upon his own head.

What will the king do? vv.7-10.

[Let us read these verses.](#)

“And the king arose in his wrath from the wine-drinking and went into the palace garden, but Haman stayed to beg for his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that harm was determined against him by the king. And the king returned from the palace garden to the place where they were drinking wine, as Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was. And the king said, “Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?” As the word left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman’s face. Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, “Moreover, the gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, is standing at Haman’s house, fifty cubits high.” And the king said, “Hang him on that.” So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the wrath of the king abated.”

We come to the final verses of chapter 7 and the judgment upon Haman. Upon hearing what Esther had said the king’s anger is aroused and he goes out into the palace garden. No doubt to clear his head and not to act hastily. But Haman stayed indoors to beg for his life because he saw clearly that harm was determined towards him by the king. Haman oversteps court etiquette and ordinary decency before royal persons. The king returns from the garden, at the same time as Haman falls on the couch where Esther reclined no doubt to plead for his life. The king immediately assumes the worst that Haman was going to take advantage of the Queen by assaulting her in his presence and in his own home. As the king spoke those words the servants immediately knew what was going to happen, they cover Haman’s face as a man now condemned. Harbona one of the king’s trusted servants speaks to the king about the gallows that Haman had prepared for Mordecai, the same Mordecai whose word had saved the life of the king. The king does not need to consider any more what should be done to Haman; “Hang him on that.” Once the execution had taken place then the king’s anger was abated.

Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on ‘The world that left God out’, Esther chapters 5-7, “A distant king, a proud official, and a brave queen”, talk number T1329.

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