

AN EXECUTED SCOUNDREL

DEVOTIONAL READING: Luke 19:11-26
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Esther 3, 5, 7

ESTHER 7:1-10

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? and it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom.

3 Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour 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 tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage.

5 Then the king Ahasuerus answered 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, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.

7 And the king arising from the banquet of wine in his wrath 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 bed whereon Esther was. Then said the king, Will he force the queen also before me in the house? As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.

9 And Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, said before the king, Behold also, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who had spoken good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman. Then 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.



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I. Scheme Explained

7:1. Esther's invitation to *the king and Haman* results from Mordecai's telling her about Haman's plan to slaughter the Jews.

2a. Overindulgence of *wine* seems to have contributed mightily to Vashti's dismissal as queen (Esther 1:7-10). At Esther's *banquet*, however, *the king* seems much better behaved.

2b. Ahasuerus expresses his willingness to hear Esther's *petition*. Having been asked to wait during the banquet of the night before, he is no doubt curious about what's on Esther's mind. Thus his exaggerated offer of up to *half of the kingdom*.

3. For Esther and her people, time is running out. At least two months have elapsed since the king's extermination order was issued, leaving less than nine months before it is to be enacted. That may seem like plenty of time. But it's not, given the vast expanse of the Persian Empire and the limitations of ancient methods of communication.

4a. Esther begins to expose Haman's plot to destroy the Jews (Esther 3:9). Haman must be the one to connect the dots first: Esther is a Jew! Her statement *we are sold*, phrased in the passive voice, avoids implicating the king (see also 4:7). The heaping up of phrases—*to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish*—emphasizes the dire consequences of her *people* being sold.

4b. The second part of Esther's statement is difficult to interpret. Esther could mean that she would have kept silent if her people were "only" *sold* into enslavement rather than to death. On the other hand, Esther might mean that she would keep silent

if economic loss from their enslavement would not equal the loss from their deaths. Oppression in slavery would still hold out the possibility for God to release His people, but death would not. Either way, this is Esther's diplomatic way of stressing the extreme importance of the issue.

Esther conveys that she has seriously weighed the situation before speaking up. She may not realize that Haman has withheld the identity of the people he has targeted for destruction. One would think that the king himself would have asked that identity. The fact that he didn't indicates his absolute trust in Haman. And since the decree has now been sent all over the Persian Empire, one wonders if the king is still unaware of the identity of the group being targeted.

II. Culprit Exposed

5. Some wonder why *the king* can apparently be so clueless. But the questions are reasonable given the facts that (1) it's been several weeks since he was involved in this issue; (2) kings are busy people and therefore delegate tasks to subordinates; and (3) the king is just now being made aware that *Esther* is part of the target group.

6a. If *Esther* has been concerned that Ahasuerus would become defensive, here she is probably relieved to be able to point the finger squarely and only at *Haman*. She does not identify him as her personal enemy but as *adversary and enemy*.

Esther has stated her concern with humility and deference, following the expected protocol of the royal court. Tact is of utmost importance, given that Esther is accusing the king's most trusted adviser of treachery that involves misuse of the king's own power. She is careful to level this accusation at Haman without implicating Ahasuerus himself.

6b. Haman's reaction is like that of many who are caught in wrongdoing. He

KEY VERSE

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knows he is exposed; the only question is how *the king* will react. Esther has completed her speech.

7a. With his blood boiling, *the king* storms out. He need hear no self-defense from Haman. The king has put the pieces together, and Haman's guilt is obvious. The king's highest official has abused royal authority, though the king does not know why. Haman has had his own best interests, not the king's, in mind.

7b. The king's intentions toward *Haman* are clear. Haman must do something, but he has no good option. He cannot follow *the king* outside, nor can he add to his guilt by fleeing. The warning from his wife and friends, thematic of the book as a whole, should have been heeded: "If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him" (Esther 6:13).

8a. Desperate for mercy, *Haman* approaches the queen who is reclined on her couch-like *bed* to plead for his life. Her silence may have increased his desperation, for he falls onto her couch.

8b. How *the king* might have handled Haman's treachery before seeing this no longer matters. Ahasuerus indicts Haman for violating harem protocol and, even worse, appearing to *force* himself on *the queen*. In the Persian system, the only men allowed near the queen or the king's other wives and concubines were eunuchs. (They are referred to in the book of Esther as "chamberlains.") Otherwise, an advance on any member of the harem was considered an affront to the king himself.

The king's officials thus act on what they recognize as a capital offense. They

cover *Haman's face* because he is no longer worthy to see the king.

III. Scoundrel Executed

9a. Esther has taken some of the king's *chamberlains* into her confidence during the passage of years. One of them has knowledge of Esther's difficulty, probably from joining in her fast.

The chamberlain *Harbonah* speaks up to inform *the king* that Haman has erected a high structure for a humiliating execution of *Mordecai*. Haman had left the first meal in high spirits. But after another confrontation with Mordecai on the way out, he once again became enraged. At the suggestion of his wife and friends, he had gallows set up with the intent of having Mordecai hanged on it.

9b. If *the king* had any remaining notions of sparing Haman's life, those thoughts now leave him permanently.

10. The execution takes place immediately, given the time indicator in Esther 8:1. For *Haman* to meet his end in the manner *he had prepared for Mordecai* is the supreme irony of the book. Such an outcome points to God's work on behalf of His covenant people. God brings Haman's wickedness down on his own head in the same way the Bible often declares. Before that day's end, Ahasuerus will give to Mordecai the signet ring that he had entrusted to Haman, along with the position and authority that Haman had held. The Jews find deliverance by a second decree of the king.

The Feast of Purim commemorates this deliverance. This celebration includes a meal and hearing the book of Esther read aloud in a synagogue and giving food and other forms of charity.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Act justly in every situation.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

AN EXECUTED SCOUNDREL

Into the Lesson

A Florida couple was arguing over possession of a pickup truck to which each claimed rightful ownership. The man came up with a plan to plant cocaine in the vehicle, hoping that his girlfriend would get caught with it and the vehicle would then be his. The plan went awry when police caught him in the act of planting the drugs. He was arrested.

There's something very satisfying about proper vindication and retribution. That's exactly what our lesson is about today.

Into the Word

Read Esther 7:1-10. Even though God is not mentioned in the book of Esther, many of the events seem providential. Working through the actions of the text, mark your conclusions in that regard as indicated below. Use the Scripture text on page 31 to mark your answers.

1. Circle all the verbs and other action words in the text of Esther 7:1-10.

2. Put a *P* next to each word you circled that is much more likely to have happened as a result of God's providential intervention rather than normal human behavior or random chance.

3. Put an *N* next to each word you circled that is much more likely to have happened as a result of normal human behavior or random chance rather than God's providential intervention.

4. Put a ? next to each word you think could go either way.

What other book of the Bible does not mention God by name?

Into Life

Read the following scenarios. How would you respond to them?

Your supervisor uses unethical business practices that put you in compromising situations.

An acquaintance asks you to go to a rally to support a cause that violates your beliefs.

Someone you care about is being unfairly attacked on social media.

Write a prayer of repentance about a time when you could have opposed an injustice but failed to do so.

If only I had . . .
