

July 11, 2021 | Esther: Fractured People Flawless God

Week 7 | Esther 5:9-6:14 | “The Falling of a Proudful Man”

Announcements:

- Operation Christmas Child
- Special kingdom man gathering at Bob's house this coming Saturday.
- Pray for George and Jackie Nemphos in the loss of her son, Donnie. The funeral will be Saturday, July 24th @ 10:30 w/ reception to follow.
- Pray for Bruce Ribb with injury to his eye.

As we discussed last week, Esther chapter five should've ended with Esther's first banquet. Today that'll become even more evident as the narrative focus moves away from our hero, Esther, and once again centers on the rivalry between Mordecai and Haman. We'll witness as a grown man will throw a veritable temper tantrum simply because someone doesn't like him. He'll be flying high on the hog one minute but in the dumps the next. Haman is on the up and up by every metric he can see, but when Mordecai does not show him the proper respect Haman thinks he deserves, all that happiness quickly evaporates. In its place, an evil scheme will take root as a way to soothe Haman's wounded pride. However, little does he know, in rushing to shed innocent blood Haman will find he has forfeited his own and played right into the hands of a providential God. Thus, as we'll see, Haman's story is a cautionary tale about this one elementary fact: All men, great and small, will fall before God.

READ: Esther 5:9-14 (ESV)

⁹ 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. ¹⁰ Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and brought his friends and his wife Zeresh. ¹¹ And Haman recounted to them the splendor of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honored him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and the servants of the king. ¹² Then Haman said, “Even Queen Esther let no one but me come with the king to the feast she prepared. And tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king. ¹³ Yet all this is worth nothing to me, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.” ¹⁴ 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.

Leaving dinner with a full stomach and more than a little drunk, Haman's heart is full. Everything seems to be going his way. He's the second-in-command. He's rich. His genocidal plan to destroy the Jews is well underway. Even the Queen herself has invited him to not one, but two dinners! Haman, no doubt, thinks this signifies that he has won favor with the king and the Queen. At this point, Haman must believe that everyone loves him. But there is an exception: Mordecai. Like water on asphalt in July, all of Haman's happiness evaporates the moment he sees Mordecai. And this time, Haman is enraged for three reasons: not only does Mordecai refuse to bow before Haman (as before), he also refuses to stand as Haman passes by, and also, he refuses to tremble in Haman's presence.

Haman cannot abide such a blatant show of disrespect. So, he calls his friends and wife together. He begins to talk about all that he has (i.e., his great wealth, how many sons he has, his position in the land, and how he won favor with queen Esther). Ironically, his friends, and especially his wife, would've already known about these things; after all, Haman did not get his ten sons by himself. However, a man with such a tender ego as Haman would always feel the need to preen and gloat, even to those closest to him. But his crowing was merely the foundation for his gripping. Because, though everything in his life is perfect, one horrible, unforgivable thing outweighs them all. Thus, after he recounts how awesome he is, Haman then says it's "worth nothing" to him so long as Mordecai lives. One wonders what his friends, wife, and sons would've thought when they heard that. But how do his wife and friends respond? They counsel peace? No. How about patience? Haman would need to wait less than a year to see Mordecai's demise. But no. Instead, they told Haman to first build a stake 75 feet high (high enough so that all of Susa can see it) and hang Mordecai on it. Afterward, they say, Haman can then go merrily off to dinner.

Now, at this point, we're struck by how something as evil as impaling someone on a stake is referred to as "pleasing" to Haman. This not only illustrates how much Haman hated Mordecai, but it also reminds us of how Haman thought his plan to annihilate an entire people group (the Jews) was "good" (cf. 3:11). Indeed, a worldview devoid of a biblical foundation will regard "good" as evil and "evil" as good. And while I'm tempted to ponder the implications of that further, we have a problem we need to discuss. A serious wrench has been thrown into the plans of Esther and Mordecai. Despite all their efforts, and even if Esther were to succeed in her plea to save the Jews at tomorrow's banquet, she would be too late to save her father. Haman had every intention to hang Mordecai well before the dinner party.

Moreover, he'll spend the whole night erecting the 75-foot gallows and then purposefully arrive early to speak with the king. Neither Esther nor Mordecai know about this threat. Mordecai will

die unless Someone intervenes. And, as we'll see, Someone (with a capital S) does, in fact, intervene. And I must say, because of that divine intervention, the ensuing scene is ***the*** funniest in all of Scripture.

READ: Esther 6:1-5 (ESV)

¹On 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. ²And it was found written how Mordecai had told about Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, and who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. ³And the king said, "What ***honor*** or distinction has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" The king's young men who attended him said, "***Nothing*** has been done for him." ⁴And 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. ⁵And the king's young men told him, "Haman is there, standing in the court." And the king said, "Let him come in."

It has been well-attested that one of the greatest offenses in Persian culture was to withhold honor to those who deserve it. Thus, in this chapter, we're reminded about an event that took place some six years prior in Esther chapter 2. There, Mordecai saves the life of the king but is not rewarded. Now, it is at this point that we should mention that Xerxes is not being an attentive monarch scouring the royal archives for any discrepancies. This would be entirely out of character with the kind of Xerxes we have in Esther. Instead, he seems to be using the droning on of some no-name court official who is reading from what would've been a dull and tiresome read to put him asleep. Not unlike how, when my wife cannot sleep, I will read her passages from a Church Law and Taxes book. The irony here is that the court officials just so happen to read from a passage where Mordecai's exploits in saving the king's life are recorded. What a coincidence, right? What are the odds?

The irony does not stop there. Because it just so happens that as the king has resigned himself to honor Mordecai, Haman (Mordecai's archnemesis) quietly waits to have an audience with the king about wanting to kill the very man the king wants to celebrate! Both men think the timing is impeccable but for utterly different reasons.

READ: Esther 6:6-11 (ESV)

⁶So Haman came in, and the king said to him, "What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?" And Haman said to ***himself***, "Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?" ⁷And Haman said to the king, "For the man whom the king

delights to honor, ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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 honor, 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 honor.'" ¹⁰ 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." ¹¹ 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 honor."

Man! I love that passage. If we had the time, I would read that again. It just gets funnier and funnier the more you read it. But, alas, lunchtime is almost upon us. So, instead, I want you to notice a couple things, and then we'll wrap it up.

First, notice, Haman does not stop to question who it is the king is referring to. He just assumes the king was talking about him. And what does Haman love more than anything? Himself. This is why, rather than ask for money or land, Haman asks for recognition. What do you give a man who has everything? Publicity, praise, and a parade. Everything Haman counseled the king to provide was of royal significance (i.e., "royal robes" "the king has worn," a royal "horse the king has ridden," paraded through the streets by the royal "officials," while someone proclaims that the rider of the horse is one whom the "king" himself delights). Now, contrary to some commentators, this was not Haman's bid to become king. Even he knew that was an impossibility. I'd argue Haman didn't want to king; it was far more advantageous for him to be the one manipulating the king. But to be king for a day? That is a dish far too enticing to pass up.

Secondly, only the king was in the dark about the relationship between Haman and Mordecai. As we've seen, Xerxes lives in a royal bubble. He had no idea the level of animosity between those two. He certainly didn't even know what people group Haman wanted to destroy. Had he been aware, he would not have suggested that Haman be the one to parade Mordecai—the very man Haman hated more than anyone else—around the city. But, in this, there is a further irony. Because, while the king was oblivious, Mordecai and Haman were well aware of their feud, as well as all of Persia. In thinking he was doing his kingly duty, Xerxes reduced his own Prime Minister to something akin to a court jester. To see Haman parading Mordecai throughout the city must've been hilarious to many. But more than that, to see how the tables had turned

on Haman in such a spectacular and public way was evident to all that Haman's days were numbered. This is best illustrated in the very next scene where Haman's own wife and friends will abandon his cause.

READ: Esther 6:12-14 (ESV)

¹² Then Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman hurried to his house, **mourning** and with his head **covered**. ¹³ 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." ¹⁴ While they were **yet talking** with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and **hurried** to bring Haman to the feast that Esther had prepared.

The plan to hang Mordecai was undone in less than twenty-four hours. The people of Susa could see Mordecai's flame had begun to dwindle, and now his friends, and even his own wife, could see the writing on the wall. The reason for Haman's fall from grace? Mordecai is of the **Jewish** people. Haman's friends and his wife may not have believed it before when they counseled him to hang Mordecai. Still, now that the tables had turned in such a spectacular and public way, the fact was undeniable: the God of the Jewish people fights for them, even here in Susa. That they speak about Mordecai's nationality in their reasoning is proof enough that they knew Jewish history. No doubt Zeresh and Haman's friends would've heard how Israelite's God delivered them from captivity in Egypt. They would've been reminded how, though they were the underdogs, they came into the promised land and defeated one nation after the other, eventually becoming the wealthiest and most powerful nations on the planet (cf. 1 Ki. 10:23). Suddenly, all that history that had felt so distant to them was now very, very real. They themselves were making history; though, not in the way they intended. They now realized if Pharaoh fell, so too would Haman fall.

So, what's the takeaway?

All men, great and small, will fall before God.

READ: Philippians 2:1-11 (ESV)

¹ So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵ Have

this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Haman thought he could stand against Mordecai and all the Jews. And, if the Jews had been standing by themselves, he very likely would've succeeded. After all, history is littered with the corpses of long-dead empires and forgotten people groups. But Israel survives simply because Israel does not stand by itself; God stands with her. And any who set their sights on destroying God's people will first have to contend with God himself. And, as we talked about two weeks ago, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31)

The prideful, boastful, and willful array themselves against God. They think they will prevail. But what they do not yet realize is that they have just engaged in a fight that they cannot win. God would rather all men come to repentance than perish (cf. 2 Pet. 3:8-10). But should man stand resolute and unrepentant, God will humble him in the end.

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All men, great and small, will fall before God. Why not bend the knee now?

VIDEO DESCRIPTION

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here: