

## July 18, 2021 | Esther: Fractured People Flawless God

### Week 8 | Esther 7 | "Poetic Justice"

#### Announcements:

- Operation Christmas Child
- Pray for George and Jackie Nemphos in the loss of her son, Donnie. The funeral will be this Saturday, July 24th @ 10:30 w/ reception to follow.

Today we come to the climax of our story. While the risks at play have not diminished, the chapter before has all but assured that a favorable outcome is imminent. Esther and Mordecai have done their part, but it is now up to God to make up the difference. And make of up the difference He does. Haman can already feel the tide has turned against him, and, by the end of this chapter, he will be utterly washed away by a wave of his own misdeeds rebounding against him. He will learn the hard way that all actions have a way of ricocheting. Do "good," and typically, "good" has a way of finding its way back to you. But do "bad," and it is surprising how the bad a person does will find them in the most unlikely and the most coincidental ways. We all know the adage, "What goes around, come around." And Haman is a perfect example of that.

#### **READ:** Esther 7:1-6 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup>So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. <sup>2</sup>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." <sup>3</sup>Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor 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. <sup>4</sup>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." <sup>5</sup>Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who has dared to do this?" <sup>6</sup>And Esther said, "A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!" Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.

As I'm sure you've noticed by now, it is hard to understate how cunning and clever Esther is in our story. As she has done before, she couches her request to the king in an overabundance of formality and respect. At the very least, she knows Xerxes is obsessed with his own honor and dignity (cf. 1:10-22). And while there is no doubt the king wanted to know Esther's request (this was, after all, the third time he'd asked), Esther does not rush in. As was the custom, she waits

until the banquet is all but ended, when Haman and Xerxes are both full of food and wine, before answering.

What's more, we see Esther's careful and calculating mind in how she phrases her requests. The king asked her what one thing she wanted, but Esther responds with two things. Xerxes asked her what her "wish" (singular) and her "request" (singular) was. The use of terms "wish" and "request" are nothing more than an example of the pleasantries and formalities that are so indicative of the royal court. In Xerxes' mind, "wish" and "request" were one and the same. But Esther sees them as two different things. This is because her ethnicity is unknown. Her "wish" was that her life is saved, fair enough, but her "request" was that her people's lives be saved; this is something more. In this, she not only reveals her true identity to the king, but she equates her own life with the lives of her people. To save one is to save the other. But failing to save the one is also failing to save the other. And so, she asks for both. She turns one request into two.

The shock on Xerxes' face must've been apparent because Esther then moves on to explain how her life, and the lives of her people, have been put in jeopardy. She says they've been "sold," to be "destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated." By phrasing it this way, she references Haman's decree because it also used the very same terminology that the Jews were to be "destroyed...killed...annihilated" (cf. 3:13). Furthermore, by indicating that this threat was initiated via a transaction (i.e., "sold"), Esther hints at the bribe Haman gave Xerxes. But ingeniously, she uses the passive voice when she says this word to not implicate Xerxes in any way. Esther knew that while Xerxes was far from being a saint, the real villain was Haman. She would get nowhere if she tried to accuse Xerxes along with Haman. Even though we—the audience—know that Xerxes is as much to be blamed for the threat against his own queen as Haman is.

Esther then moves on to compare two types of sales. There is the one type of sale, which by today's standards is appalling, but according to Esther's standards, would've been, amazingly, the preferred choice. And that type of sale is slavery—i.e., the selling of people. This kind of sale is to be compared with another type of sale, which is the purchase of a person's life for the purpose of murder. Esther says, "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." Here, Esther engages in the hypotheticals to emphasize how truly bad her and her people's circumstances are at present. Essentially, her point is that the Jews had already been sold into slavery multiples times. In fact, Persia was a relatively new tyrant for the Jews. And true, slavery is not preferred under normal circumstances; but when the choice is between mass genocide or

mass enslavement, mass enslavement wins out by a slim margin. But, per Esther's point, they haven't been sold en masse to become slaves once more; they have been sold for one very simple, but one very horrifying, reason: to die. This is why she feels it's necessary to bring it before the king. The topic of slavery would've been mundane to Xerxes and therefore seen, at best, as an inconvenience or, at worse, as in offense, especially after all the delaying and banqueting. However, the topic of genocide in which his own queen was at risk is a significant concern to the King. And, as we've pointed out, the irony in all of this is that Xerxes is as much to blame as Haman; but she knows that she will get nowhere if she starts attacking the king.

What's more, while Xerxes is, without a doubt, culpable, Haman is the true mastermind and the true enemy of the Jews. Xerxes was manipulated, but Haman is the manipulator. Thus, she must attack the King's second-in-command about a decree that the King himself approved without appearing to attack the King as well, even though both are to blame. What a precarious minefield Esther has to navigate.

To this revelation, the King, shaking with shock and rage, spits out two important questions, "Who...and where is the one who did this?" To which Esther, likely pointing in the direction of the only other person at the table, says, "A foe and enemy.... this wicked Haman!" You can almost hear her as she bites off each word in her desire to make her point. We're told that Haman is "terrified" not only before the king but before the queen also. He had come to dinner thinking he was seated amongst friends and now realizes all too late that he's stepped into a trap.

So, what happens? Let's continue reading.

**READ: Esther 7:7-10 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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." <sup>10</sup> So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the wrath of the king abated.

What is a man who cannot so much as tie his shoes without consulting his advisors to do when his own advisor has been unmasked a traitor? He gets some air. Xerxes is overwhelmed by what Esther has just revealed about herself and his prime minister, Haman. The room itself feels as if it would close in and suffocate him. So, he goes to the gardens to think. And, as we know, Xerxes has a lot to think about: first, there's the fact that he did not know the true identity of his own wife; secondly, there's the unsettling reality that Haman had clearly manipulated him for his own devilishly schemes; lastly, there's the really embarrassing fact that he himself was also to blame for this current set of circumstances. If he were to do nothing, his wife, the Queen of Persia, would die. If he renounces Haman, he not only loses a very wealthy ally, but Xerxes also admits that he made a mistake. His honor and respect would diminish in the eyes of the people. What is he to do? Luckily for Esther, providence chooses for him.

The story tells us that just as Xerxes returned from the gardens, he sees Haman falling on Esther. Now, bear in mind, Persians ate reclined on large pillows with a low-rise table in the middle. So, what would you think if you were to come in and see a man you already do not like, falling on top of your own wife who is, herself, already laying down? To say the least, you would think something lewd and indecent was going on. Add to this that the protocols regarding men and the king's harem were rigorous. So much so that if any male figure needed to approach one of the King's concubines (let alone the Queen), they were not to come closer than seven steps. Thus, we can see how genuinely scandalous this must've appeared to Xerxes.

What's more, the king is already intoxicated and agitated; he's bound to jump to conclusions. Thus, while we—the audience—know Haman had no intentions of sexually assaulting Esther, that is precisely what he is falsely accused of. In begging for his life, he sealed his fate.

Now, it is at this point that some have criticized Esther for not speaking up and setting the record straight. However, no one argues that Haman had inadvertently assaulted and threatened Esther by the decree. True, he may not have tried to rape her; but Haman had every intention of harming Esther. What's more, she might've spoken up if given a chance, but before she can, one of the King's eunuchs reveals an interesting little factoid. Harbona tells the King and Queen that Haman has erected a 75-foot pole in his front yard to kill Mordecai. The eunuch also reminds Xerxes (though it is doubtful he needed reminding considering he just honored the man) that this is the very man who saved his life. And how did the eunuch know about the stake? He likely was one of the eunuchs tasked with bringing Haman to the banquet (cf. 6:14). No doubt, as he escorted Haman from his home, Harbona inquired as to the reason for the gallows. Thus, “coincidence” steps in to seal Haman's fate.

So, confronted with what appeared to be an impossible decision, the king is handed an out. He not only gets to kill Haman, which is what he wanted to do from the very beginning, he also gets to avoid being humiliated. Thus, Xerxes commands, "Hang him on it." Even this irony was not lost on Xerxes. To him, as well as to us, there is poetic justice in hanging the man on the very gallows he himself had intended to hang another.

### **So, what's the takeaway?**

Those who dish out evil in the lives of others will raise up evil in their own lives.

Do you see how Haman's demise is perfect irony? He dies on the very gallows he had intended to kill Mordecai with. What's more, was it for the threat against the Jews? No. It was for the false accusation that Haman had tried to force himself on Esther. Thus, a man who, in chapter 3, plotted the destruction of an entire race using a false accusation, is himself undone by a false accusation.

**READ:** Proverbs 22:8 (ESV)

Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity, and the rod of his fury will fail.

**READ:** Mark 4:21-25 (ESV)

<sup>21</sup> And he said to them, "Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a stand? <sup>22</sup> For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light. <sup>23</sup> If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear." <sup>24</sup> And he said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. <sup>25</sup> For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."

**READ:** Galatians 6:7-10 (ESV)

<sup>7</sup> Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. <sup>8</sup> For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. <sup>9</sup> And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup> So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

All evil is sown into two soils: the lives of others and the life of the sower.

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## VIDEO DESCRIPTION

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Pastor’s manuscript can be found here: