

DHW
BIBLE STUDY CLASS
THE BOOK OF ESTHER
LESSON 5

INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 ends with Esther declaring to put her life on the line to approach the king without being called. According to Persian law it could mean certain death. Chapter 5 takes us to the resolution of that tension. Would King Ahasuerus receive her or would he reject and send her to be executed? And if the latter happened, then the Jews would either be exterminated at the appointed time or else God directly would intervene with a miracle to save His people. The chapter, however, is filled with irony and surprise on the part of the four protagonists: King Ahasuerus, Haman, Esther, and Mordecai.

Life is also filled with paradoxes. The way to become the chief is to become the servant of all. The Lord Jesus Christ taught this paradoxical truth to His disciples. This truth is illustrated in the events in this chapter. Haman the enemy of the Jews who was full of self-pride seeking only to advance himself and his self interest, was brought down whereas Esther who was humble and who fasted and prayed

to God, was raised up. Pride goes before a fall. A wicked man will be pursued by evil itself, but the righteous good will be accordingly rewarded. Another sad thing is that people, who have wealth and power, could enjoy nothing. This is also illustrated in the life of Haman. The virtue of trusting and patiently waiting upon the LORD is seldom learned. We fret because the wicked seems to be prospering in his way. All the more we need to have faith in the LORD who is the righteous Judge.

The following is a suggested outline of the chapter:

1. Esther goes to King Ahasuerus (5:1-3);
2. Esther, instead of presenting her petition, invites King Ahasuerus and Haman to her banquets (5:4-8);
3. Haman is unable to enjoy all his wealth and power because of Mordecai who still sits at the king's gate (5:9-13);
4. Haman seeks the permission of the king to hang Mordecai from the gallows which he erects as suggested by his wife and friends (5:14).

STUDY THE WORD

**Esther goes
to King Ahasuerus**

Esther proceeded to the king's palace *on the third day*. This means it was not after three full days of fasting and prayer, and suggests that Esther had found sufficient confidence, and realized that she had to act quickly.

She *put on royalty* (literally in Hebrew), and as correctly translated, she wore her royal robes and her royal crown to meet the king. Although the crown is not mentioned, the text suggests it. She put on her very best for she was the only one who could put on royalty thus accepting her royal position and importance. Another wise action on her part was that she was not presumptuous. She had already broken the law for approaching the king without being summoned. Now she did not barge in but she waited in the wings of the king's throne room where she could be noticed, and at the same time to see what would be the king's response.

The king saw Esther his queen. She must have surprised him. He was also aware that she had broken the law for coming to him without being called. However, he was pleased to see her, having not seen her for thirty days. He was being reminded how beautiful his wife Esther was. King Ahasuerus held out his golden sceptre to Esther. This signalled that she was free to approach him, and that she would not be sentenced to death. The grammar of the text – *she obtained favour* – indicates that Esther had worked for this moment of favour. She did not leave to chance as she acted wisely and thoughtfully. Appeal by fasting and prayer to God's providence does not negate a believer's responsibility to do his best.

Esther humbly and submissively approached the king by touching the top of the sceptre. Then King Ahasuerus asked her: *What wilt thou, queen Esther? And what is thy request? It shall be given thee to the half of the*

kingdom (v.3). He called her "Queen Esther." This is the first instance in the book that King Ahasuerus addressed her as such. The king also indicated that he was aware that Esther had come for an urgent matter, which was important enough to risk her life. He was eager to please her. He asked her what her petition was. The fact that he was willing to give half of his kingdom to her should not be taken literally, but to be understood that he was willing to give her anything. God answered the first part of her prayer. The threat of death to her was removed. Esther would not die but live!

Esther Invites King Ahasuerus and Haman to her Banquets

Esther was expected to petition the king for the lives of her people. This was the very purpose why she had risked her life to call on the king. The king was so happy on that day, and he was very generous and willing to give her anything. Instead she asked the king and Haman to come to her banquet. What an anti-climax! Anyway, Esther invited the king in a meek and amiable way. She did not impose on the king but rather appeal to the king's heart by saying: *if it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him*" (v.4). She was being compliant and polite. Another surprise is, why Haman also? Did she not know that Haman was the enemy of the Jews? This is unimaginable knowing the nature of the petition she would ultimately have to make to the king. One point that is not very clear is that she had prepared the

banquet *for him* (v.4b). Who is “him”? Is he the king or Haman? If it was Haman, then Esther was acting wisely by playing up his ego and at the same time lulling him into a false security. If it meant the king, then Esther complied with the old adage: the best way to a man’s heart is through his stomach. Surely, for all intents and purposes, Esther should have struck while the iron was still hot.

The king ordered his servant to summon Haman to come quickly to attend Esther’s banquet. The king then asked Esther: *what is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed* (v.6). Obviously it was after they had eaten and drunk. King repeated his question and made the same offer to Esther. Again she sprang another surprise. She invited the king and Haman to a second banquet on the following day. She continued maintaining her respectful, submissive and meek demeanour, and politely and winsomely asked the king to come to this second banquet. Hoping not to incur the king’s impatience, she promised him that she would present her request as he so desired at this second banquet. But this delay could be dangerous. Haman was the king’s most influential and dangerous official. He was capable of thwarting her request and manipulating the king against her. So, Esther’s delaying strategy and keeping her request close to her heart at this moment could be wise in her eyes. She probably relied on her female intuition and instinct to defer her request. Was she depending

on God for the right moment of success?

Haman Is Unable to Enjoy His Wealth and Power

Haman returned home that day after Esther’s banquet *joyful and with a glad heart* (v.9). He had made his way past the king’s gate. As he passed by his presence was known and the officials at the king’s gate stood up and rendered their due respect to him. But Mordecai, who was no more in mourning clothes, did not stand up nor did he move for him. Haman was filled with rage against Mordecai. Haman could not stand the sight of Mordecai and also his capacity as a royal official. However, he was able to control his temper, showing that he was not a victim of his own emotions. Why was he able to control his anger? The text does not reveal, but there are a few suggestions. Perhaps he realized that continued venting of his reputation was not doing him any good. He could have consoled himself that soon Mordecai and his people would be gone. Or perhaps he was eager to get to his wife and friends to boast of his good fortunes.

When Haman returned to his home, he called for his wife and friends. He told them of the great wealth that he possessed, and *the multitude of his children*. In those days, one of the measurements of manliness was the number of children that he had, and went without saying that he had many concubines. He had been the favourite official of the king by the fact that he had been promoted to the rank of second-in-command in the empire.

Moreover, the king had ordered his subordinates to pay homage to him whenever he went. In addition, Haman prided himself that he was the only person Esther invited to accompany the king to her special banquet which she had prepared herself. And then the next day he was invited again together with the king only to Esther's second banquet. Nevertheless, Haman admitted that all these wealth, power, positions, possessions, and privileges were of no consequence as long as he saw Mordecai, the Jew, sitting at the king's gate.

How foolish was he; just because of Mordecai, he should feel dissatisfied, angry and bitter. Haman was a person who only thinks of himself and promotes himself. He is full of self-pride and self-interest. Such a person is never satisfied in his heart. He illustrates the fallen nature of man. Indeed, Haman's misery which is self-imposed arose from his glaring vice, that is, pride. *He brags, he boasts, he gloats, he crows!*

Haman Seeks the King's Permission to Hang Mordecai

Seeing Mordecai's pathetic emotional state, Zeresh, Haman's wife and his friends tried to console him. They told him to erect a gallows fifty cubits high, and ask for the king's permission to hang Mordecai. Then he could be very happy and be able to enjoy himself with the king at Esther's second banquet. The idea pleased Haman. He ordered the gallows to be erected that night. Obviously, he would be present to see the carpenters build the gallows. Why so high? Fifty cubits

is about seventy-five feet. It was very high. It is clear that he wanted all the inhabitants of Shushan to see. What kind of wife and friends did Haman have around him? They would have been better friends, especially his wife, if they had warned him of the danger and the consequences of his wounded pride.

PRACTICAL VALUE

There are a number of lessons we can learn in this chapter from the main characters. Divine providence does not negate human responsibility. Many Christians may have the idea that since they have prayed to God, there is no need to observe common cultural norms and practices. Although Esther had called the Jews to fast and pray for her, she put on the right clothes to approach the king. This is right. God sees the heart and not the external appearance but never said that one should not wear presentably according to common social norms. On every Sunday, we should be wearing our Sunday best to worship the LORD. If our heart is truly right we would express it in our appearance. The notion that a Christian maybe careless in his/her dressing and yet be beautiful and worshipful in his/her heart is hard to accept. How many of us would take much thought and trouble to wear appropriately and presentably when applying for a job or attending an important function! Why should Christians practise a sub-standard behaviour in this regard when approaching God?

Esther was humble and meek and sensibly intelligent. In contrast

Haman was proud, boastful, and foolish. She got what she wanted—the king’s grace and mercy. She teaches us the right way to relate with others. Haman’s pride attracts friends who were no good at all for they placated or pleased him when they should have counselled him to do the right thing. Are you a friend who would say things to another in order to please him so that you are always in his favour? May it never be so! How many people have suffered because of such behaviour!

The king’s business must be done in haste. This may be true but not always. The king’s business must be done properly and timely. Esther’s delay in presenting her petition to the king is not a bad thing. It is true that she was taking a risk. But the risk of presenting her petition without being fully assured in her mind and heart that she would get a positive response from the king is more risky. Suppose the king wanted to consider her request, Haman would immediately go into action to influence the king. Esther’s action must be understood as a God-given wisdom using her female “sixth sense.” So, sometimes we should not rush into doing things. We must consider carefully. However this does not mean that we should be procrastinating.

The next thing all of us ought to learn is the destructive power of bitterness and anger. This is illustrated by Haman. In spite of the fact that he was rich and powerful, and had been blessed with so many good things, he was unduly angry and bitter over a man who refused to honour him. It made him unhappy and unable to enjoy all the

blessings that he had. This anger and bitterness were gradually and unknowingly eating him up. We should remove such feelings in our heart. As Christians we should commit such matters to the Lord who is the righteous Judge, and as He said (Romans 12:19): *Dearlly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.* AMEN