

DHW
BIBLE STUDY CLASS

LESSON 6

ESTHER 6

INTRODUCTION

This chapter offers a classic case study of the sin of pride and its consequences. God's Word plainly declares (Proverbs 16:18): *Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.* Haman has displayed that he was a proud and evil man. But thus far, he had been prospering. And the ordinary reader of the Word of God may be fretting and anxious to know when justice would be meted to the wicked. The LORD has promised that while the wicked may eye to slay the righteous, yet the LORD would not let the righteous to be in the hands of the wicked (Psalm 37:32-33).

By the end of chapter 5, all hopes seemed to have gone. The Jews, who are God's chosen people, were under threat of being totally annihilated. At this juncture there seemed to be no hope for them. Esther had delayed in pleading for the lives of the Jews. In addition, Mordecai was in danger of being hanged if Haman managed to get the king's permission. Haman had a strong influence with the king not to mention his manipulative skill. Unless God intervened to save His people, there seemed to be little or

no hope. Would God intervene to save His people? Would Esther plead for the Jews in her second banquet? Would the king come to the second banquet? Would Esther be successful? What and how would Esther present her petition? Could the Persian law be revoked and the Jews be spared? Was God still in control? These questions loom in the mind of the reader, who would expect the answers to these questions in chapter 6.

The following is a suggested outline:

1. King Ahasuerus suffers from insomnia (6:1-3);
2. Haman presumes that he is the man whom the king wants to honour (6:4-6);
3. Haman proposes how he should be honoured (6:7-9);
4. The king orders Haman to honour Mordecai (6:10-11);
5. Zeresh and Haman's friends predict Haman's downfall (6:12-13);
6. Haman is hurried to Esther's second banquet (6:14).¹

STUDY THE WORD

**King Ahasuerus Suffers from
Insomnia**

On that night refers to the night after the king had returned to his palace from Esther's banquet. It was a crucial night and what happened would change

¹ A. Boyd Luter & Barry C. Davis suggest the following outline: (1) The record of the empire (1-3); (2) The request of the emperor (4-6); (3) The recklessness of the enemy (7-9); (4) The reward of the exemplar (10-11); (5) The remorse of the enemy (12-14)

the course of events that would eventually save the Jews and exalt Mordecai. The king could not sleep on that night – literally, sleep fled away from him. No reason is given for his sleeplessness.² One reason why the king could not sleep was that he had too much to drink and eat at the banquet. Another reason was his trying to think what Esther’s petition could possibly be. Whatever the reason, we know that on that night, Mordecai was in great danger. Haman on the same night had little or no sleep because he was erecting the gallows to hang Mordecai. Whatever might be the reason, the king could not sleep on that crucial night, and the divine-inspired author plainly expects the discerning reader to see the hand of God at work to deliver His people.

The king asked for *the book of records of the chronicles* to be read to him. The king’s choice for the records of his reign to be read to him was strange. He had the choice of many activities for his sleeplessness. He could summon for music, dancing girls, or even a bevy of girls from his enormous harem. Yet he chose to have the government records that chronicled his reign to be read to him! Such records were full of anecdotes that might relieve his sleeplessness and boredom, and information that might give instruction to the king. So, the records were brought and read loudly to

² King Nebuchadnezzar could not sleep at a key moment because he was troubled by a dream which was sent by God to him (Daniel 2:1). King Darius could not sleep because he was troubled by Daniel’s likely fate in the den of the lions (Daniel 6:18).

him. The grammatical tense of the verb “to read” indicates that the reading went on for some length of time.

When the reading came to the part which chronicled the saving of the king’s life by Mordecai, the king was awakened. It is interesting to note that there were many volumes of such records available. For the king’s servant to pick this particular record from the shelf was indeed amazing. The king then asked his servants (v.3): *What honour and dignity hath been done for Mordecai for this?* The king’s servants replied that nothing was done for him. At that moment, the king strangely asked (v.4): *Who is in the court?* Haman was in the court yard. Clearly, he went there early in the morning to be the first to have an audience with the king. The reason was that he wanted to ask the king for permission to hang Mordecai. What an irony! The king was about to think how he could reward Mordecai for thwarting an attempt on his life, and Haman was about to ask him for his approval to hang Mordecai.

Haman presumes that he is the man whom the king wants to honour

The king ordered his servants to let Haman enter into his room. Haman came in. The king asked him (v.6): *What should be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?* King Ahasuerus was so used to asking others, especially his servants, for their ideas and opinions. When Vashti defied his command to appear at his banquet, he asked his seven princes what should be done to Vashti (1:15). And when he missed Vashti, he did not

know what to do, until one of his servants suggested that a better lady should be found to replace Vashti (2:3, 4). And now in this instance, he asked Haman for his ideas.

What shockingly interesting is that Haman thought in his heart that he was the man whom the king was delighted to honour. Instead of asking the king the name of the person whom the king wanted to honour, he presumed straightaway that he was the person. His pride and ego had dulled his mind, and his eyes could see no one beyond his nose. So he happily plunged right in with his proposal. He began by restating the king's words to him: *for the man whom the king delighteth to honour* (6:7). Then he continued and proposed the following things: that the royal robe which the king wore, and the horse which the king rode, and the royal crest be placed on the head of the horse, be brought out (v.8). And these items should be delivered personally by hand by the king's most noble prince, for the servants to dress *the man whom the king delighteth to honour*. And then let the king's most noble prince lead him on horseback through the street of the city and loudly proclaiming before him: this shall it be done to *the man whom the king delighteh to honour* (v.9).

Observe that in his brief and rapid proposition, Haman repeated three times the words which the king spoke regarding the man whom he wanted to honour. The package Haman proposed to the king in fact exalted the man as equal to the king. For one thing, the parade was centred on one man, and even the king played

no part at all. One can see that only Haman could conceive such a plan. It was because of his super-self-ego which was the hallmark of his character. Secretly, Haman dreamed of being the king. Was Haman laying the ground for a coup against the king? Given his fanaticism, this was plausible. Haman was not prepared for the rude shock that was coming to him.

The King Orders Haman to Honour Mordecai

The king immediately said to Haman to *make haste* and honour *Mordecai the Jew that sitteth at the king's gate*. There was no room for any mistaken identity. It was *the* Mordecai who sat at the king's gate and who refused to pay homage to him. The king even repeated the specific items which Haman proposed, and told him to ensure that nothing was left out. The king specifically mentioned that it was Mordecai the Jew, and not any other Mordecai. The king could have been told by the servants who read the records of the chronicles that Mordecai was a Jew because Esther had registered it in his name. This must have been a terrible blow to Haman.

It was a crushing blow for Haman. It was the king's command to honour one whom Haman considered as the most despicable man in the world, and his arch-enemy. Worse still, he was to lead Mordecai adorned with royal robe down the street of the city in full view of all the inhabitants of the city of Shushan. And what would the officials at the king's gate who had earlier reported to Haman about Mordecai's refusal to respect him

think? Would they not laugh at the sight of Haman leading Mordecai and proclaiming that Mordecai was the man whom the king delighted to honour! We know that the king did not realize that he had struck three hard blows on Haman's face: Haman hated the name Mordecai, and identified him as the Jew, and his official position—*the one who sitteth at the king's gate*. Haman was told to do it without delay. He could refuse or disobey the king. It was very humiliating for him.

Zeresh and Haman's Friends Predict Haman's Downfall

After the parade, Mordecai returned to sit at the king's gate as if nothing much had happened. The divine-inspired writer was silent on this note on how Mordecai reacted. On the other hand, Haman hurried back to his home grief-stricken and *having his head covered*. Having his head covered shows that he was ashamed and devastated. When he returned home, Haman told his wife and all his friends every thing that had happened to him. Then his wise friends and his wife, Zeresh, said to him (v.13): *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*. These were the same folks who had played on his ego by suggesting to him to erect a gallows to hang Mordecai, and go and enjoy the banquet to be hosted by Esther who had earlier invited him together with the king to attend. They predicted that he would be doomed because Mordecai was a Jew. Did they know something about the Jews and their God who had a

hand in the exaltation of Mordecai? And whosoever would persecute God's people would be doomed to failure and destruction. As Gentiles, they would not know these theological truths. Instead of comforting Haman in his darkest hour, they left him hanging by himself. However, what they uttered was the truth. Indeed, it was already the beginning of the Haman's downfall. The tables were now turned against the wicked Haman. These words from his wife and friends drove another "nail" into the already grief-stricken and humiliated Haman.

Haman Is Hurried to Esther's Second Banquet

And while Haman, his wife Zeresh and his friends were still talking, the king's servants came to escort Haman hurriedly to the banquet which Esther had prepared. This was the second banquet. Haman had hardly caught his breath, and then whisked away to the banquet. He was led like a sheep to the slaughter. That morning he thought that the early bird would certainly catch the worm; but alas the worm gotten him instead. Now present at the banquet would be Esther, the king and Haman. At this second banquet, Esther had promised the king that she would definitely present her petition to the king.

PRACTICAL VALUE

The divine writer wants us to know that the events in this chapter were particularly the result of God's providence working to save His people. Since the day Esther decided to approach the king to plead for the Jews, things had not been improving although

the Jews had prayed for three days and nights. Things continued to get worse for God's people. The edict to destroy them had not been repealed or changed. At the beginning of chapter 6, Mordecai's life was hanging on a string. And so we witness that man's extremity is God's opportunity. Events in chapter 6 took a sudden dramatic turn that changed the course of history: the sleeplessness of the king, the discovery of Mordecai's good deed in saving the king's life, the intention of the king to honour Mordecai, the timing of Haman's appearance before the king, the king's request to Haman how to honour Mordecai, the humiliation of Haman, the prediction by Haman's wife and friends, and whisking away of Haman to Esther's second banquet when Esther would present her petition to the king as promised. All these events did not happen by chance nor can they be explained as mere coincidences.

The only reasonable explanation is that they were the providential work of God to save His people. God had made a covenant with His people, and He would not let anyone thwart His plan and purpose. This is a great comfort to us as Christians who belong to God. Our grief and suffering are temporary, and we can be assured that one day they will be removed by the wonder-working of God in our lives. We need not fear that anything untoward will happen to us without the knowledge and permission of God. And if such bad things should happen to us, we know that they are for our good. While we recognize the providence of God working on behalf

of His people, we also see another truth related to it. It is that God providentially works even through the day-to-day circumstances of life. He works through such human phenomenon as insomnia, the reading of specific text of a specific book, the anger of a man, the timing of events and even the words of unbelievers, and the actions of people doing their jobs. We learn that nothing in life is too insignificant for God to use it for the good of His people and the downfall of their enemies.

One glaring truth concerning pride is aptly illustrated in this chapter. In the book of Proverbs, it is stated: *Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall* (16:18), and another, *A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit* (Proverbs 29:23). Haman was full of pride. He could think of no man better and greater than him and who deserved all the best in life at the exclusion of others. And what God has declared in His Word concerning man who indulges in the sin of pride that he will fall and be brought down. God will not be mocked; what He has said will happen. This is a warning to the people of the world who rebel and reject Him. Ultimately, every one will have to bow and be brought down before Him. Hence, bow now and be lifted up by Him, or bow later and be thrown into Lake of fire.

Another valuable practical lesson which we can learn is to choose our friends carefully. Haman was surrounded by so-called wise friends. When he was rich and powerful, his friends advised and supported him.

Knowing his ego, they advised him to erect a gallows and hang Mordecai on it. And with his enemy removed, he could enjoy his special dinner with the king at Esther's banquet. This suggestion pleased Haman. But when he was emotionally devastated and humiliated after being ordered to honour Mordecai the Jew publicly, his same friends, instead of comforting him, they expressed words of doom upon him, and left him alone. Beware whom we choose to be our friends. A friend in need is a friend in deed. Difficult situations in life often reveal our true character traits. Many people surrounded our Lord Jesus Christ wherever He went and healed the people; and they even welcomed Him on His triumphant entry into Jerusalem. But when He was falsely accused, arrested and tortured, they shouted for His death by crucifixion. We should be discerning. Choose good friends who are able to comfort in practical ways, and counsel you with the Word of God. AMEN