

Esther 06-04-18A

This is Tuesday, the 18th of April, 2006. It would have been my grandmother's 102nd birthday today. She was born in Pawnee, Indian Territory, 1904, on this day.

But we continue tonight our study in the book of Esther, picking up in chapter 7. Let's take a moment as we begin to clear our minds, prepare our hearts, seek the ministry of God's Holy Spirit as we look together at the truth of God's Word. Shall we pray? Father, we are grateful for another opportunity to explore your Word, to find in it those promises, principles, and doctrines that will equip us for every good work. We pray that we might have concentration, insight, and understanding, that we can remember and apply the things that we see in this great book.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, when last we saw Haman, he was depressed.

He had just got through leading Mordecai through the streets on the king's horse, in the king's robe, pronouncing, Thus shall it be done for the man whom the king delights to honor. And this is a great spot in the narrative. Somebody who I was reading talking about this was praising the narrator, the author who actually wrote this story down, because there are times when the story really kind of carries its own weight and you don't have to say a lot.

And there's nothing said here about what Mordecai said and thought or what Haman said and thought. It's enough to know you can fill in the blank yourself. The picture of Haman leading Mordecai around on this horse and the author wisely knows when to just be quiet and let that image sink in for us.

One thing I want to point out for you is in verse 12, afterward, Mordecai went back to the king's gate and this afterward section, this verse 12 is really a significant verse. It seems like it's just a gap filler to get the story moving forward, but look at what it says. What is Mordecai associated with here? Mordecai returns to what? The king's gate.

The king's gate. Haman hurried to his house mourning and what? Everybody read that out loud. What's the last phrase in verse 12? Haman goes to his house mourning and what? With his head covered, right? Mourning and with his head covered.

In case you missed that, he goes to his house mourning and with his head covered. Now, covering the head is a sign of mourning. When David was leaving Jerusalem, remember Absalom came in and took over and drove David out and he was going across the brook Keter and up the Mount of Olives, very steps where later the Lord Jesus would walk.

It says he and those who were with him were weeping and with their heads covered. It's a sign of mourning. That's not the only thing it's a sign of.

So we pick up tonight with that little bit of review in chapter 7 because you remember once Haman got home and he was commiserating and he told Zeresh, his wife, and all his friends that he had had to lead Mordecai around on the horse and these same people who were all full of great advice build the gallows, execute Mordecai, go happily to the feast, now are filled with gloom and doom. And why is this? When they hear the reversal, when they hear

what has happened to Haman and how he has been completely upended, they are a superstitious people. The Persians are superstitious.

They're big on dreams. They're big on omens. They're big on influences.

Xerxes is this way. Ahasuerus is this way. Remember at the very beginning he was trying to figure out when to go to battle with the Greeks and he's trying to get everyone on board and he consults with his wise men and asks them to look at the augurs and the omens and so on and find out what is going to be good.

Haman, when he wants to perpetrate this plot against the Jews, goes and rolls the bones and throws the dice and casts the Purim, the lots, to figure out what day for the execution of the Jews. They're a very superstitious people. And so, Zeresh and the friends of Haman, when they see this absolute checkmate on Haman by Mordecai, with Mordecai not even trying, and everybody knows Mordecai is a Jew, that fills his wife and his friends with a sense of gloom.

And so they say, if Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, they say, whoa, that's a pretty strong mojo there. You're not going to be able to overcome that. If he's Jewish, you'll not prevail against him.

And now they're suddenly remembering. They've been taking the Jews for granted for decades. The Jews have been under the aegis of the Babylonians and under the Medes and now under the Persians.

They've been a subjugated people and they've sort of forgotten about the God of Israel and about the stories of old when God brought them out of Egypt with a mighty hand. But now they begin to sense that the Jews are on the rise and it is the Jewishness of Mordecai that comes to the forefront for Zeresh and the friends. And they say, if he is of Jewish descent, you will not prevail against him.

And now they're suddenly remembering. It's the God of Israel. It looks like he's at work for them again.

So if he is, you're cooked. It's not just a racial thing, it's a God thing. And it's the God of Israel that they're thinking of and it's the power of God that they're remembering.

While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs came and hastened to bring Haman to the banquet which Esther had prepared. The king's eunuchs came. Who are the king's eunuchs? Didn't we have a list of their names somewhere? Remember back in chapter 1? It gave us the list of the seven eunuchs.

Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas. Seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus. They were the ones that were supposed to bring Vashti before the king.

Remember that? And it's a little bit of a dark cloud on the horizon that these same eunuchs have come to get Haman and bring him to the banquet. Because when they came to get Vashti, it didn't turn out well for Vashti. She ended up getting banished.

What's the name of the third eunuch there? We have Mehuman, Biztha, and then Harbona. Well, now in chapter 7, the eunuchs had come and brought Haman to the banquet which Esther had prepared. So the king and Haman went to dine with Queen Esther.

And on the second day at the banquet of wine, the king again said to Esther, What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Up to half the kingdom. It shall be done.

Then Queen Esther answered and said, If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me as my petition and my people as my request. I know it says at in your English, but the sense of the Hebrew here is my petition is my life and my request is my people. For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated.

Had we been sold as male and female slaves, I would have held my tongue, although the enemy could never compensate for the king's loss. Well, she has finally broached her request and her petition. And once again, she does it tactfully.

She does it skillfully and wisely. She uses the same introduction she used before. If I have found favor in your sight, O king, if it pleases the king.

Then when she says, let my life be given me as my petition and my people as my request. For we have been sold. And the word here for sold is makar, M-A-K-A-R in Hebrew.

When you look this up in the lexicon, it's very interesting because it literally means to make merchandise of something, to sell a piece of land. And since this is the niphal, that's the passive voice. So instead of selling something, you are the thing being sold.

Something receives the action of being sold. It could be used reflexively to sell oneself. But it also means to be given over or to give oneself over.

And it came to mean to betray. To sell someone out. Just like we have in English.

You sold me out. You sold out. You've betrayed something.

And it has the very same sense, makar has the same sense in Hebrew that sell out has in our modern language. So Esther says, we have been sold out. We've been betrayed.

We have been victims of a nefarious plot. All of that is kind of wrapped up in this word. Now keep that idea of betrayal in mind.

So naturally the king says, he answers and says to Queen Esther, Who is he and where is he who would dare presume in his heart to do such a thing? This is really kind of a comical piece of Hebrew. Because it literally says, it's like he's spluttering. The king, if you put this in literal English, he says, who? He? This one? Where? This one? He? Who has filled his heart to do this? The king is just like, what? What? He's like backpedaling.

He can't figure out what's going on. Who? He? What one? Where? This one? He? Who? The Hebrew is all chopped up. And it's a reflection of probably the Aramaic that he was speaking at the time.

And he's taken totally aback and he's in shock. And it just completely takes him by surprise. He's expecting the queen to say, oh, I saw this great ermine coat that somebody brought in the other day, or I'd like an olive grove to give to my family.

The king has no inkling that she is going to be talking about a threat to her life and to her family and her clan and her tribe and her people and so on. So the king is all just flustered. So Esther says, the adversary and the enemy is this wicked Haman.

And now it's Haman's turn to splutter. And it's kind of like Esther with one hand knocks the king over, and with the other hand she knocks Haman over. So the adversary, the enemy is this wicked Haman.

And so she uses three epithets in a row for Haman. She uses Tsar, which has the idea of a... it's not far from the same... we have Tsar that means prince, but he is an evil man, an adversarial man. And he is Oyev.

And Oyev has the idea of someone who is utterly hostile. This hostile man. He is this Haman Ha-Ra.

Haman the wicked. Ra, R followed by the A that's made from an ayin, the evil ayin. Ra-a means to see, and ra-a means to be evil or to do evil.

If it has an aleph, the nice A, it's to see. If it has the ayin, the evil A, it means to do evil. And so she says, Haman Ha-Ra, Haman the evil.

The hostile one, the adversary is this... and then she says, Hizeh. And so it comes out like this when she says it. She says, Haman Ha-Ra Hazeh.

Haman Ha-Ra Hazeh. And I don't know if you can catch it, but in Hebrew it's just very dramatic. And Haman just goes boom, boom, boom.

It's like three strikes and you're out. Haman Ha-Ra Hazeh. And he's out.

He's down for the count. So Haman was terrified before the king and queen. This word for terrified is really interesting as well.

It's only used a few places in the Bible. And it speaks of a fear for one's life. It's used of David when he saw the avenging angel.

It's used just a couple of places. We don't have time to go there. But this is mortal dread.

Haman was in mortal dread. It's kind of like his heart turns to stone. He's so afraid.

So the king arose in his wrath from the banquet of wine and went into the palace garden. Now why does he do this? Well, he is in a state of confusion. Here's Haman that he's led into his most intimate fellowship with his queen.

Very rare privilege enjoyed by virtually none. And here's the queen who is the apple of his eye and who he's granted her life and told her she can have up to half the kingdom and so

on. And suddenly this warm intimate banquet reveals his wife, the queen, and his highest and greatest advisor, Haman, to be literally mortal enemies.

And he's like, who? What? Here? Where? What? And so he stands up and he just stalks out. He's got to clear his head. He's got to get some air.

He's got to figure out what to do. And he doesn't have any advisors around to plant an idea in his brain. And this is another part of the beauty of the wisdom of Esther in revealing this at a private banquet and not in a formal setting at the palace where any one of the seven eunuchs could jump in there and say, well, why don't you do this? Or why don't you do that? There are only one or two of the eunuchs present at this private banquet.

And we're going to see which one in particular is there shortly. So the king arose in his wrath from the banquet of wine and went into the palace garden. But Haman stood up.

Now remember, at the banquet, they reclined. They always did this in the ancient world. They would recline on a couch.

Remember back in chapter one, it talked about the couches that were decorated with gold and silver and the marble parquet floor and all that? Well, they're in one of these areas. And there's just the three of them. And then there's this sort of periphery of eunuchs and servants and one thing or another hanging around in the corners.

But they're reclining on these couches. So the king jumps up off of his couch and stalks out. Haman jumps up from his couch.

And so the only one still reclining, the only one still calm is Esther. She's draped gracefully on her couch there. And so Haman jumps up and stood before Queen Esther pleading for his life, for he saw that evil was determined against him by the king.

So what a strange and violent twist that where just seconds before this, Esther is pleading for her life, suddenly Haman is now pleading for his life. And Esther is the only one reclining and calm. Everybody else is stirred up.

And the one who was originally threatened with the loss of her life and the loss of her people, she's the calm at the eye of the hurricane here. And Haman is pleading for his life. So the king, having gotten a gulp of fresh air and a stiff slap in the face by the cool breeze, he comes back in just in time to see Haman who is so frantic to save his life that he has fallen and grabbed the queen on her couch.

Well, this is not to do. You don't touch the queen. And you certainly don't fall on her while she's reclining.

But he should have rushed out into the other side of the garden and gotten his breath and gotten his thoughts together. But he's in a panic. And in this mortal dread, he says, Oh, queen, I beg you.

And the one who had the power and was threatening her life and wiping out millions of Jews is now frantically grasping at her clothes saying, Please help me. And as he falls on her,

on her couch, grabs her clothes, grabs the queen, well, the king walks back in. Well, that just absolutely hammers Haman out of sight.

Because as soon as the king sees that, he says, Are you also going to assault the queen while I'm in the place? That's what it literally says in Hebrew. I'm right here in the place. You're going to assault the queen? Now, it doesn't mean that the king thought Haman was trying to have his way with her.

It's just like the legal definition of assault in the law. If you raise a weapon in a threatening manner, that's assault. If you land the weapon on somebody, that's battery.

But you can assault someone just by drawing your fist back with a gat or a bat or a stick or some other implement of mayhem. That's assault, is threatening someone. And so the king basically says, Approaching that close to the queen would have been an assault.

You've not only approached, you've fallen on her. You're grabbing at her clothes. You're laying on top of her legs, probably, on her couch there.

And the king comes in, just when he thought he'd gotten himself composed and he was rational and he was going to say something profound and king-like, well, he walks in and here's Haman grappling with the queen and he just absolutely goes off. He says, Are you going to attack the queen while I'm here in the place? Well, at this point, the bystanding eunuchs and stewards and so on, they pretty well know the jig is up for Haman. And as the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.

And what did I emphasize at the beginning of the lesson? What happened after leading Mordecai around the city? Mordecai went to the king's gate. Haman went home doing what? Covering his own head. Covering his own face.

Now, somebody else is covering his face. And they basically put a bag over his head because in ancient Persia, if you were some sort of a malefactor, if you disgraced yourself, you remember all of the protocol and the etiquette just for Esther or anyone else to even approach the king? To even be in the king's sight unbidden could bring you a death sentence. Well, if you're standing there in the presence of the king and it's revealed that you're a criminal, that you've done a crime, well, you're not worthy to look on the king.

And so they immediately, they just grab a tablecloth or something and they just bag Haman's head because he's not fit to look on the king and queen. And that's it. They might as well just have sewed him up in his hammock and put a cannonball in it and thrown him over the side because he's done.

So they bag up his head. Now, Harbonah, one of the eunuchs, ever helpful, Harbonah, one of the eunuchs who was dealing with Vashti back in chapter 1, one of the eunuchs who no doubt went to get Haman back in chapter 6, verse 14. The king's eunuchs came and hastened to bring Haman to the banquet.

And when they were hustling over there to get Haman and bring him so he would be on time, they saw this great big scaffold thing going up. And they saw this big high 75-foot pole arrangement going up. And so what did they do? While a couple of them were going in

there getting Haman, others of them were asking the servants and saying, Hey, what's this? You know, we're a couple of thousand years too early to have an antenna for radio reception or something.

What is this thing? What's this big tall thing? And the servants say, Well, you know, Haman's got it in for Mordecai and he's planning to hang him on it in the morning. So the eunuchs all know this. But they keep Mom because it's not their place to speak at a turn.

But Harbona, now that it is his turn, speaks up. And you have to figure Haman under the bag is just groaning. Because Harbona says, Behold, the gallows, fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai.

Mordecai, who spoke good on the king's behalf. This is just throwing gasoline on the fire. Good old Mordecai.

Well, Haman was fixing to hang him. The guy who saved the king's life. This Haman was about to execute him on this big old gallows.

And you could imagine, you know, if Foss could kill, why Harbona would have just exploded from Haman's hatred at that point. But he says, Haman made these gallows for Mordecai, who spoke good on the king's behalf. And it's standing at the house of Haman.

Right there in his backyard. Big 75 foot pole arrangement. So the king said, Hang him on it.

Just hang him right in his own backyard. So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's wrath subsided.

Now, I want to give you a little excerpt from the Jewish Encyclopedia under the entry for gallows. Because as I mentioned before, this is not a noose like you have when you play hangman and you put the 12 loops and you cinch it up and you strangle or break the guy's neck. Remember you put the knot right behind the left ear.

This isn't that kind of gallows. This is what the Jewish Encyclopedia has to say. A framework consisting of one or more upright posts supporting a cross beam.

So think of an upright post supporting a cross beam used for executing those sentenced to death. In the Hebrew Bible, the word etz or tree is the word used for gallows. That's our word here, etz, tree.

Haman is hanged on a tree. It's an upright post with a cross piece that he had prepared for Mordecai. In the Mishnah, the gallows is described as in two parts, the upright called the Kura, which was firmly fixed in the ground and the etz, the transverse beam from which the condemned was suspended by the hands.

What picture do you get from that? Haman is up there 75 feet in the air with his hands tied to the cross piece at the top of this 75 foot high cross. He prepared a cross to hang Mordecai on and instead his own defeat and his own death is advertised at the top of that very cross. Now if that doesn't suggest something to you, you're just not very suggestible.

Because there was a plot, there was a threat, there was the sure expectation of victory on the part of Haman, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. And ever after in the book of Esther, every time Haman is mentioned, he's called Haman the enemy of the Jews just like Judas is always called the one who betrayed the Lord. Haman from now on is called And this is a powerful foreshadowing of the reversal that's going to take place hundreds of years later at another cross that was intended to defeat a Jew and instead defeated the enemy of the Jews, the enemy of God's people.

So there's some wonderful symbolism here and a powerful reminder to us because the same God that was at work preserving the Jews, preserving Esther and preserving Mordecai and working things together for good for those who loved Him is the God that works for you and for me, that looks out for us, that works all things together for good when we love Him and we respond to that call to His purpose. So I'll leave you with a question. Do you think it is a worthwhile life to pursue the life of faith and the life of obedience as a believer? Do you think you gain or do you think you lose by setting the things of this life aside and pursuing the things of God? Who do you think is going to come out ahead? Those who try to angle and leverage and maneuver and manipulate in this life? Like Haman? Or those who trust in God, who are faithful to God and His Word like Mordecai? It's pretty clear from this chapter what God intends for us.

Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll pick up in chapter 8.