

1. My topic for this lesson is about understanding God's timing. A common questions people who believe in God have is how do we wait on His timing? After all, we believe in a God we can't see, hear or sense. So if we believe He does work on His timing, when does that occur? How do we know when something is the right time? Finally, what does any of that have to do with the story of Esther? Hopefully, this lesson will answer some of these questions.
  - a) Let's start with Esther. These three short chapters describe the main plot. That is, a plot is underway to kill all Jewish people who were living back then. Esther herself does some interesting things that combine both making an effort on her part as well as waiting on God's timing. The villain of the story (Haman, boo) as well as the king of the empire who was not Jewish, were both in effect pawns used by God in order to get His will done.
  - b) One might one might be wondering at this point is, if all of this is true, why did God allow millions of Jews to be killed by Hitler during World War II? After all, this story of Esther has a lot of similarities to that Holocaust. If God is a "God of the Jewish people", why did He allow that to happen? Why didn't he allow Hitler to be killed by some act prior to that Holocaust happening? If God desires to preserve His people why did Hitler live through the war (and kill himself after millions of Jews were already dead)?
    - i) This question has been debated a lot. I'd make the biblical argument that God still cares about the Jewish people as a group despite that tragedy. The one good thing that came out of that event is it allowed Israel to have their own country again as an independent nation for the first time since before the Babylonian captivity took place, which is prior to our story in Esther. In terms of desired results, Hitler did fail just as Haman failed, and other attempts to wipe out the Jewish nation failed.
    - ii) I hold the view that God judges all people fairly and since eternity is a whole lot longer than our time span on earth, that gives me comfort over such tragedies. In short, I can't explain why that Holocaust happened, but since I trust in a perfect God who is on the throne, in effect, that is His problem to eternally judge.
2. Meanwhile, back to the issue of "God's timing". Yes that tragedy was terrible and yes the tragedy being played out in Esther's time was avoided by the actions of a brave young woman. We'll get to the details of God's timing through that story throughout this lesson.
  - a) Meanwhile, what about God's timing in our lives? How do we know when it is time to act and when it is time to wait for an answer? My view is we always start with surrender. It is a matter of telling God, "I have this tough decision to make. I don't know whether to proceed or wait. Heavenly Father, I want Your will done. Help me to let go of what You want me to let go of, and proceed where You want me to proceed." Once we turn over the results of our situation to Him, we then proceed. If things get worse, or simply don't get any better, that may be a sign of God wanting us to wait on His timing.
  - b) Personally, I have discovered that God works best when we have run out of all options. It is usually when there is nothing else we can do, is when He steps in and makes it better. Why is that? That way we can't share the credit with Him. That way He and He alone gets all of the glory. That is why we should go full speed ahead in life. We should make the best decisions possible and allow for God to work in life, His way and on His timing.
  - c) If we can learn to do that, I find His timing becomes obvious if we are willing to watch Him work and be willing to trust Him with the results. Yes we still have to make tough decisions and have to move forward as if He doesn't exist. We have to remember that He does exist, He does desire to guide our lives and He does want to work out our lives for His glory on His timing. It is a matter of trusting that He working in the background.
  - d) Speaking of God working in the background, it is time to get back to Esther.

3. Chapter 5, Verse 1: On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance. <sup>2</sup> When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.
  - a) Let's start by asking what does "the third day" mean? If you recall from the end of the last chapter, the hero of our story, Esther, devised this plan to save the Jewish people. That plan was to have all the Jewish people living in that city fast for Esther for three days while she does likewise. Her plan was then to risk her own life by asking the king to resend the order to kill all of the Jewish people. Here are the dangers for this plan:
    - i) In that society, the queen (Esther) was not allowed to approach the king without his permission. She was risking her life just to see the king on this question.
    - ii) The next problem is that laws in that society were not revocable.
    - iii) Therefore, she was asking the king to make an exception not only to let her speak, but also to make an exception about revoking the laws.
    - iv) You talk about wanting God to work now, this is a prime example. That is why she asked all the Jewish people who lived nearby to fast and pray for her.
  - b) All of this leads back to the expression, "On the third day". To put that another way, she is hoping the Jews of that city are still fasting and praying. The three days and nights are not over yet, but she is asking God to work through her. She is figuring, I might as well do this while many of my fellow Jewish people are still thinking about this issue and are still fasting on my behalf. Therefore, it was near the end of the three-day period where she took the risk to go see the king and see what was going to happen.
  - c) Let's personalize this: Does this mean if we are about to do something risky, we should have everyone we know fast on our behalf first? Of course not. However, like I said in my opening comments, it is a great idea to surrender the results of our actions first to God and in effect tell Him, the results of whatever we do is now His problem, not ours. Yes He wants us to take risks on His behalf. Yes God wants us to learn to trust Him daily and that often requires taking real risks. If we can convince others to pray on our behalf, that would encourage us not to let them down and take a risk in order to find out just what is God's timing on any particular issue. Meanwhile, back to Esther.
  - d) The next thing to notice is that Esther got all dressed up for the occasion. If you recall from the last chapter, Esther was fasting herself for three days. She did not approach the king wearing "sackcloth and ashes" (a Jewish way of expressing sorrow), but put on her best outfit. I'm assuming she fixed up her hair and face and tried to look her best.
    - i) Remember she is risking her life with this approach. She also knew that the king picked her to be the queen based on her looks, so she was "selling what she's got".
  - e) The bottom line is this effort worked. The king took one look at her and said in effect, "OK honey, I know you are risking your life to approach me like this. I figure it must be something important. Come on, tell "kingy" what is on your mind." ☺
    - i) Verse 2 gives the type of details that was relevant to that story. The king held a stick that was called the royal scepter. For someone to touch that stick was to acknowledge the king as being the king. In other words, Esther did not die for the act of approaching the king without being summoned. She didn't at this moment just blurt out the whole plot about the plan to kill all the Jewish people. Instead she acknowledged the fact he is the king by touching his ruling stick.
      - a) Think of this as an acknowledgement of who is in charge.
    - ii) Verse 2 also said the king was pleased with her. Translation: She was still a very good-looking young woman and I'm sure she was looked her best. The king took one look at her and thought, "Wow, I've got that to myself. Yes I'll grant whatever she wants as she is all mine."

4. Verse 3: Then the king asked, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you." <sup>4</sup> "If it pleases the king," replied Esther, "let the king, together with Haman, come today to a banquet I have prepared for him."
  - a) The king was so taken by her risk to see him, he makes the bold statement, "What is it you want? I'll give you up to half the kingdom to tell me what it is."
    - i) Know that "half the kingdom" is an expression and was not meant to be taken literally. During the time of Jesus, Herod the king had his adult niece dance for Him. That seductive dance turned on that king so much he told her, "What do you want? I'll give you up to half of my kingdom." (Mark 6:23). My point is back then, when kings make that gesture, but it is not something to be taken literally.
  - b) What is interesting is that Esther didn't just blurt out her request there on the spot. Right here is a great example of working on God's timing. To understand the answer she gave in Verse 4, keep the following thoughts in mind:
    - i) Remember that Esther herself has not eaten herself for three days. I'm sure food was on her mind when one is purposely avoiding eating. She probably thought, let me eat something when the fast is over and I can respond better then.
    - ii) She probably also correctly thought, this is a king who loves big banquets and to drink. Therefore, let me hit him up with the big question when he is comfortable at that type of setting.
    - iii) I cannot say for sure whether or not all of the prayers of all of the Jews living in Susa at that moment were part of that answer, but I suspect it was so. Just as God made it possible for Esther not to be killed for just approaching the king, I also suspect God was influencing her to ask for a dinner party instead of just blurting out what was on her mind.
    - iv) Give Esther credit for her restraint. After being hungry for three days, she could have just blurted out what was on her mind.
5. Verse 5: "Bring Haman at once," the king said, "so that we may do what Esther asks." So the king and Haman went to the banquet Esther had prepared. <sup>6</sup> As they were drinking wine, the king again asked Esther, "Now what is your petition? It will be given you. And what is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted."
  - a) Let's think about this from the king's perspective: He understood that Esther did not risk her life just to throw him a dinner party. He knew something was up and he figured it must somehow involve Haman. The king had enough affection for Esther that instead of pushing the issue at that moment in time, he probably just said, "get me Haman so we can get on with the banquet and see what really on her mind."
  - b) The scene then moves either moments or hours later to the actual banquet. My guess is that first of all, Esther was happy to be eating something. Imagine how much restraint it must have been for her to slowly eat, and not just blurt out what was on her mind. Here was her enemy Haman right in front of her. My guess is she just focused on all the food and wine that was being brought out.
    - i) Notice how our hero is waiting on God's timing. She had the restraint to not blurt out her request. She had the restraint to not go try to strangle Haman on the spot.
    - ii) Now think about this from Haman's perspective. He was probably running around town thinking about what a big shot he was, and doing the business of being the "prime minister" (that is, the number two man) of the empire. All of a sudden, he gets a message from the king to come to the palace at once, because the queen herself, who he probably didn't know well, wanted to invite him to a banquet with just him and the king. This invitation had to feed his ego.
  - c) While all of that was going on, the king still knew something was up. The king blurts out, "Ok Esther honey, what's really on your mind? You can have it, up to half the kingdom." Again, that offer was not literal. It is just a gesture to ask, what is on your mind.

6. Verse 7: Esther replied, "My petition and my request is this: <sup>8</sup> If the king regards me with favor and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for them. Then I will answer the king's question."
- a) This is one of the most debated sections among scholars who study Esther: The debate question is why didn't she just blurt out what was on her mind? Why did she ask that both men come to a second banquet the next night?
    - i) Was she too scared to say what was on her mind? Probably.
    - ii) Was her mind still on food? Possibly.
    - iii) The truth is, we can't read her mind. All we can do is read what the text says.
    - iv) Remember that all the Jewish people living in that city were still fasting on the third day of the fast that Esther had requested of them. My personal view of this is that God laid it on Esther's heart to stall for 24 hours while God works out the events on His timing. Obviously, if one knows the events that happened over the next 24 hours, God's timing worked here.
  - b) OK John, so what does that mean for us in terms of God's timing. Do we stall? I suspect it just means that sometimes we have to trust our instincts when it comes to timing. If we don't feel the moment is right to do the right thing, maybe that is God telling us, in effect, the timing is not right. Yes we can stall forever and never take action. However, if we do have others praying for us and we sense the urge to hold off making a big decision for the moment, it is a strong possibility that God wants us to wait.
    - i) There is no perfect answer to that question. All I do know is that God's timing is always perfect and we just have to trust our best judgment of when and how He wants to work. I find that if we honest seek His timing as Esther and the Jewish people of Susa did for His glory, He will work on His timing.
    - ii) Does this mean that God wants to give us whatever we desire? No, but He does want to get His will done. I'll discuss why that is later in the lesson. Part of His will is the preservation of the Jewish nation. Since Esther and her group were seeking that will, God was willing to work through them to get His will done.
    - iii) OK John, I don't have any opportunities for any noble goal like that. How do I ask for His will? It is a matter of seeking Him and being willing to submit our lives to whatever He desires of us. I find that God in His own way and on His own timing does make it obvious to each of us over time exactly what is His will for our lives.
    - iv) Meanwhile, it is time for us to go check in back at the palace. ☺
7. Verse 9: Haman went out that day happy and in high spirits. But when he saw Mordecai at the king's gate and observed that he neither rose nor showed fear in his presence, he was filled with rage against Mordecai.
- a) The focus of the story now moves to Haman. He didn't care what was on Esther's mind. His ego was too big to focus on anyone but himself. All he knew was that he was the only guest of honor at this royal banquet. He was thinking, "Hey, I have risen in power to be the number two man in the kingdom. I can have anything I want whenever I want it. I just had private dinner with the king and the queen and I get another one tomorrow."
  - b) Despite all of the blessings Haman had at this moment, it still made him angry that Mordecai didn't bow in his presence. That is the way it is with our ego. The old saying is true, "enough is never enough". Even if Haman had all the money and power any person could ever want, he was angry because Mordecai refused to bow down to him.
  - c) Stop and think about this from Mordecai's perspective for the moment. He had just been fasting for three days. He probably knew the queen had this banquet but he didn't know the results yet. Now here comes the man who ordered the destruction of all the Jewish people coming right past him. At that point, Mordecai just did his usual "lack of bowing" as Haman went by. I'm guessing Mordecai got some satisfaction out of knowing he was getting Haman mad at the moment.

8. Verse 10: Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home. Calling together his friends and Zeresh, his wife, <sup>11</sup> Haman boasted to them about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king had honored him and how he had elevated him above the other nobles and officials. <sup>12</sup> "And that's not all," Haman added. "I'm the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave. And she has invited me along with the king tomorrow. <sup>13</sup> But all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate."
- a) Let's talk a little more about Haman here. Let's face it, a man this powerful could have anyone killed on the spot anytime he wanted to. Haman obviously didn't know about Mordecai's relationship to Esther. Haman just knew that Mordecai was a Jew, which was the sworn enemy of Haman's own people. Haman also knew that Mordecai refused to acknowledge him as second in command. He could have ordered the guards to arrest Mordecai and have him killed for refusing to act.
  - b) So why did Haman restrain himself as Verse 10 said? Truthfully, he didn't want to spoil the good mood he had from the banquet the night before. When I think of Haman, I think of the kind of guy at a party or maybe someone sitting at the end of a bar who can't stop talking about himself. I imagine that he bores people to death with his stories. He is the kind of person one thinks when one is listening to them, "Does this guy ever stop talking? How much longer do I have to listen to him?"
    - i) With that thought of a know-it-all in mind, it may help to re-read these verses. Here is Haman telling his friends about how much money he has, how many sons he has, how much power he has, and if that is not enough, he just spent the evening in a private banquet given by the queen herself.
    - ii) Haman then goes to his punch line to tell his friends and family: Despite all of the blessings I have, I can't enjoy them because of one man's refusal to bow down to me as I go past him. This is a man who probably spent the last hour (as I visualize it) bragging about all the good stuff he has in life. Then he blurts out that he can't enjoy it because of one person.
  - c) All of this leads to Haman's question: How do I really hurt Mordecai? It is one thing to just kill him. However, Haman doesn't want to just kill him, he wants Mordecai to really suffer for what he refused to do. Therefore, Haman asks his party guests, "OK, who's got an idea of how I can really make this man suffer for his actions? Verse 14 is the answer:
9. Verse 14: His wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Have a gallows built, seventy-five feet high, and ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai hanged on it. Then go with the king to the dinner and be happy." This suggestion delighted Haman, and he had the gallows built.
- a) Here was the group answer to Haman's request. In Persian culture, when they really wanted someone to suffer, they hanged him on a tall pole. This is not a hanging like one would see in a western movie, but more like a crucifixion. As I stated in an earlier lesson, the Persians invented crucifixions and the Romans who came years later perfected it.
  - b) The text mentions this structure was to be 75 feet high. (The original Hebrew uses a different term to describe the height, but the rough translation is about that height.)
    - i) If they wanted to build something fast that tall, how do they do it? Was it just a matter of cutting down a really tall tree and setting it up in a matter of hours? I don't know how the logistics of this act worked. I just know that however it was done, it was done quickly as the text tells us that it was done that day.
  - c) The bottom line is that Haman liked this suggestion. He agreed to have this structure built and since Haman had the power to do so, he probably ordered some of guards to go get started on this project right away and have it done quickly.
    - i) Remember again if Haman is this powerful, he probably had personal bodyguards and assistants to do whatever he wanted whenever he wanted. Therefore, he gave the order, and my guess it was done in a matter of hours.

10. Chapter 6, Verse 1: That night the king could not sleep; so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him.<sup>2</sup> It was found recorded there that Mordecai had exposed Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate King Xerxes.
- a) Meanwhile, back at the palace, while Haman was having a big party at home, the king was trying to sleep off the big meal that his wife just made for him. It is amazing to consider that the entire fate of the Jewish people changed simply because the king of this empire couldn't sleep one night. If one has any doubts that God doesn't interfere in the lives of people, consider the fact that because this king of a huge empire couldn't sleep, the events were set in motion to save the entire Jewish nation.
  - b) This reminds me of what Mordecai said to Esther before this whole big scene plays out in these three key chapters: It was in effect, "Esther, if you don't do something, God will find some other way to rescue the Jewish people. However, it appears that God desires to use you to make a difference in the world at this moment."
  - c) Think about the lack of sleep this way: My guess is the king couldn't sleep because it was bothering him what Esther really wanted. I know that when something is on my mind, I can't sleep well either. Because Esther delayed for one day to tell the king what was really on her mind, it caused the king to stay awake. That act of staying awake caused the king to take actions that changed the course of world history. Speaking of which:
  - d) Now we can come back to Verse 1. Because the king couldn't sleep, he does what many people do when they can't sleep: read. Since this man was the king, he had someone read to him. History records that the Persian Emperor had scribes to record all of the events of that king's business. One of the great finds of ancient history is much of these records still exist today that the Persian kings kept. In fact some of the background of this story can be confirmed to this day from the "Persian Chronicles", which is that series of books.
    - i) Now let me discuss a little more about history. At this point in the life of the king, he has been in power for about 12 years. My guess is the king told the scribe that he couldn't sleep. He then told the scribe to pick from a page at random and read it to me until I fall back asleep."
    - ii) The scribe, doing what he was told, picks an event that occurred 5 years ago. It just happened to be the event when Mordecai saved the king's life by stopping a plot to kill the king. The "Persian Chronicles" mentioned the names of the two men that the book of Esther mentioned back in Chapter 2.
    - iii) Stop and consider how God is working here. God "made it" so the king could not sleep. God "made it" so the king ordered to have the person who keeps the kings' records read to him. My guess is the king picked this scribe because he was boring to listen to, and that would help the king to sleep. God "made it" so the reader of this record picked the event from five years ago when Mordecai saved the life of the king by stopping a plot to kill him. In the next verse, we will read how instead of putting the king back to sleep, this "random act of reading" got the king excited after hearing about this event and wanted to reward Mordecai for his bravery.
    - iv) If one has any doubts that God works in the background to control the events of human history, this group of coincidences should offset that argument.
11. Verse 3: "What honor and recognition has Mordecai received for this?" the king asked. "Nothing has been done for him," his attendants answered.
- a) Again, remember that the king is half asleep. He just hears this story from five years ago, how Mordecai tried to save his life. I suspect (but can't prove) that the king knew that Mordecai was a friend of Esther. My thought is, "That is what Esther really wants. She is mad that I never rewarded Mordecai for that brave act. I know what I'll do. I'll do a good deed for Mordecai and that will make Esther happy." With that thought in mind, the king could now go back to sleep. In his mind, the mystery was solved.

12. Verse 4: The king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the palace to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows he had erected for him.
  - a) The king's next dilemma is "OK, but what do I do for Mordecai? If I want to make Esther happy I need to do something really nice for him. But what should I do?"
    - i) By "coincidence" Haman enters the courtroom at that time. Again, one can see how God's timing works here. Haman was coming into the room about hanging Mordecai. Why did Haman need the king's permission? Because Mordecai was still a city official and the king knew who Mordecai was. Therefore, Haman had to make up false accusations in order for the king to approve of this plan.
    - ii) However, the king did not know all of this at that moment. All the king knew was that he wanted to reward Mordecai for a good deed he did five years ago. He was thinking, "How do I do something special for Mordecai? I know, I'll ask Haman. After all, he has a big ego. He will know how to do something special for a person based on the way he thinks". I'll put him in charge of this event.
  - b) Again, stop and think about God's timing here: If Esther just blurted out about Haman's plan at the first banquet, none of these events would have happened. Because Esther held her peace for one day, the king couldn't sleep, Haman built this device and the king came up with this plan to reward Mordecai. Did Esther plan all of this happen? Of course not.
    - i) The lesson about God's timing is that we trust Him to work out the solution to our problems on His timing. We just make the best decisions possible and seek His will and let him work. With the idea of regularly praying for His guidance, I've always learned to trust my instincts as far as timing. Yes we will make mistakes and yes things go wrong sometimes. Still, I am convinced when we are seeking Him, He does guide us through His timing and work out our lives for His glory.
13. Verse 5: His attendants answered, "Haman is standing in the court." "Bring him in," the king ordered. <sup>6</sup> When Haman entered, the king asked him, "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?"
  - a) Remember that the king and Haman each have a different agenda at this point in the story. The king wants to reward Mordecai for a good deed he did five years ago. Haman (unknown to the king) wants to kill Mordecai and have him hanged. Since the "king is the king", he gets to speak first about what is on his mind.
  - b) Notice the king's question is phrased so that Mordecai's name is not mentioned.
    - i) Haman, with his big ego, thinks the king is talking about honoring him. Before we knock Haman for that thought, ask how we would feel if we were talking to a big shot or our boss at work and he or she asks us about honoring someone?
    - ii) I can see the king thinking here, "Haman has a big ego. He's the perfect person to ask about how to honor someone. I'll let him think it is him and then actually name the person after he rambles off his thoughts. Speaking of Haman's thoughts:
14. Verse 6 (cont.): Now Haman thought to himself, "Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?" <sup>7</sup> So he answered the king, "For the man the king delights to honor, <sup>8</sup> have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head. <sup>9</sup> Then let the robe and horse be entrusted to one of the king's most noble princes. Let them robe the man the king delights to honor, and lead him on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him, 'This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!' "
- a) You have to admit, Haman's ego comes through loud and clear in these verses.
- b) To recap, Haman says in effect, "If the king really wants to honor someone, that person should wear a king's robe, a king's crown, ride the king's horse around town and let a person lead the horse and yell out, "This is how the king honors a person".
  - i) One can just hear the king thinking, "that is why you are my chief of staff, you always come up with good ideas."
  - ii) At this point comes the key plot point, Verse 10:

15. Verse 10: "Go at once," the king commanded Haman. "Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Do not neglect anything you have recommended."
  - a) It would be interesting for an actor to play the role of Haman. You need someone with a big ego who loves to talk about himself. Then, after he brags about this wonderful plan that he thought was for himself, the king makes the announcement that this plan is for the same man that Haman wanted to kill. This story makes a great drama as one can just see Haman's face change at this point.
    - i) I can just see the king say to Haman at this point, "Oh, did you want something? Haman would respond, "never mind" and leave the room feeling depressed.
  - b) OK John, this is a nice story and I've known it for years. Explain why I should care and what does it have to do with God's timing? Do you think it was just a coincidence that the exact moment Haman wanted to walk in to tell the king about his plan to kill Moredcai was the exact same moment the king wanted to reward Mordecai?
    - i) The idea is again to realize that God is always working on His timing even when and especially when we are not thinking about Him. Yes we have no control over His timing. Still, to be aware that He is working on His timing gives us another good reason to praise Him when we do see Him work.
    - ii) Now think about all the people who were fasting for Esther the last three days. Did they have any idea this was taking place? Of course not. The point is God often answers our prayers in ways that we are not aware of how He is working.
  - c) Time for a quick time out for an interesting similar story. My daughter has a good friend whose mother has drug problems. The daughter was placed in the foster system and we haven't seen her for a long time. My wife did the footwork to track the girl down. When we least expected it, my wife got a call from the new foster mother. The girl wanted to see my daughter. Recently, they got to spend the day together the other day. After she left, my daughter broke down and cried. She realized God had answered her prayers on His timing. That is another example of how God works in the background on His timing.
    - i) I mention this story here, as it is a good example of how God's timing works. This situation was important to my daughter and to our family. We prayed a lot about and the footwork was done so that we were allowed to see her if and when her foster parents called. When we least expected it, a visit by her took place. I can't think of a better example to explain how God does work on His timing today.
  - d) With that happy story out of my system, it is time to get back to Mordecai and Haman.
16. Verse 11: So Haman got the robe and the horse. He robed Mordecai, and led him on horseback through the city streets, proclaiming before him, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!"
  - a) Haman did as the king ordered. As powerful as Haman was, he was still the number two man in power and he knew that if he wanted the king to do things for him in the future, he had to obey this command. Haman probably figured, "Let me get this over with and then I'll get back to figuring out how I'm going to kill Mordecai." Besides that, he still knew in the back of his mind, that a future day will come when all Jews would be killed.
  - b) This is also interesting to think about from Mordecai's perspective. To him, it was just going to be another day on the job at the king's gate. He still knew that the order hung over his head that a day is coming in less than a year when all Jews were to be killed.
    - i) Then out of the blue, the enemy Mordecai shows up with a horse and a bunch of clothes associated with the king. Haman probably just says, "put these on, get on the horse and do what I say". Haman probably then says, "I don't like this any more than you do, but I am following the king's direct orders."
    - ii) Mordecai just goes along with this thinking he has to obey the king's order too.



17. Verse 12: Afterward Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman rushed home, with his head covered in grief
  - a) After being paraded around town, I picture Mordecai who is probably stunned in silence to understand why all of this is taken place. Remember it has been five years since he stopped the plan to save the king's life and didn't get why he was being rewarded now.
  - b) Haman had to be in a particularly bad mood here. I'm guessing he dropped Mordecai off at the gate as soon as he could and then just rushed home to talk to his wife and friends about what he should do about this situation.
  - c) When the text says "head covered in grief", I don't think he had some sort of covering. It is just a colorful way of saying he was depressed because Haman was forced to honor the man he planned on killing that day.
18. Verse 13: and told Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him. His advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, "Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him--you will surely come to ruin!" <sup>14</sup> While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and hurried Haman away to the banquet Esther had prepared.
  - a) This chapter ends on an interesting comment. It is almost as if Haman's wife and his top advisors are biblically prophesying over the future. They are saying in effect, "Haman, this situation, is much worse than you think. It is more than the fact you had to parade your enemy around town today. In effect, you will go from being the number two man in the empire to ruins because Mordecai is of Jewish origin."
  - b) Before Mordecai had a chance to react to that statement, the guards of the king showed up and effectively said, "It is time for you to come to Esther's banquet now, get moving."
  - c) Before we move on to the next part of the story, let's talk about why his wife and his advisors make this comment about the Jewish people. It makes you wonder how much they understood about Jewish theology. Were they aware that God made a promise to the Jewish people that "I will bless those that bless you and curse those that curse you"?
    - i) While these people may not be able to quote directly from Genesis, I believe that they did have some understanding that Jewish people believed in that concept.
    - ii) The point is these "wise men" (Haman's advisors) were trained how to "read the signs". The signs were that the man Haman wanted to kill is now being honored by the king. These "wise men" took it as a sign that things are changing. For us sports fans, it is like when we watch the momentum change in a game. We can see it happening and often there is nothing we can do to stop it, at that point in time.
  - d) Meanwhile, it is time for Esther's big moment to face Haman.
19. Chapter 7, Verse 1: So the king and Haman went to dine with Queen Esther, <sup>2</sup> and as they were drinking wine on that second day, the king again asked, "Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted."
  - a) So here we are at "Banquet #2". The king knows that Esther did not have both big dinner and drinking parties and "that's it". Therefore, the king asks her again, "what do you want honey, even if it costs me up to half the kingdom?" My own guess is that the king thinks he already solved the mystery by having Mordecai paraded through town.
  - b) Back to God's timing: Esther is now convinced this is the moment to disclose the whole story to the king. Maybe she had a drink herself and got her nerve up. Maybe she just felt it was the right moment. Whatever it was, she knew this is the time to say something.
    - i) You have to imagine how scared Esther was at this moment. Yes she has been the queen now for about five years. At the same time, she was about to reveal to the king that she is Jewish, that all the Jewish people have been ordered to be killed. Further, she is about to tell the king the man he trusts most in the world is the one who ordered the execution of her people. The request she is making is in effect, "Who do you want to die now, him or me?"

20. Verse 3: Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor with you, O king, and if it pleases your majesty, grant me my life--this is my petition. And spare my people--this is my request. <sup>4</sup>For I and my people have been sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king. "
- a) Here is the way Esther makes the statement in effect, "I am Jewish. When you gave the order to kill all of the Jewish people, that order included me. All I am asking is that you do something about that order."
  - b) Further, Esther says in effect, "If the order was just to put all of the Jewish people into slavery I would have kept my mouth shut". OK, why would she say that?
    - i) For starters, it means that the promised Messiah (eternal king) would still be able to come through the Jewish people if they were just slaves. Remember that the purpose of this whole exercise is not just to save the lives of the Jewish people, but for God's promise to still come true. Part of that promise is that there would come a person one day who would rule the world from Jerusalem. That person is what the Jewish people call the Messiah and that is what we Christians believe Jesus will do at His Second Coming.
    - ii) Did Esther like the idea of being a slave? Of course not. She also understood that God never promised the Jewish people wouldn't be slaves until He comes either. Therefore, she makes this request saying in effect, "Your Highness, if you could just change the law from "death to slavery" I would have remained silent.
21. Verse 5: King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, "Who is he? Where is the man who has dared to do such a thing?"
- a) The king's first reaction is not to contemplate "death versus slavery", but who gave the order to kill the Jewish people, including my wife? Like any good politician, his first thought was who do I blame for this?
  - b) I was thinking about a king going through his daily business. There are probably dozens of tough decisions to be made daily. I'm sure the day Haman gave the request to have all the Jewish people killed was just another piece of business to be done. However, at this moment in time, the king did not realize it was his official order to do this. The king was thinking it was just some plot organized by someone below him.
  - c) To put this another way, the king wanted to save the life of his queen. He needed to find out who gave the order for this destruction in order to save Esther. Despite the faults of this king, I am convinced he really had some affection for Esther to make this request.
22. Verse 6 (Part 1): Esther said, "The adversary and enemy is this vile Haman."
- a) Now comes Esther's other big moment, where she has to reveal to the king that the person who gave this order is the king's most trusted advisor. Again, one has to imagine the fear that Esther had at this moment. She could still be killed. She is asking the king to choose between her and his top advisor.
  - b) Personally, I see the boldness growing in Esther at this moment. The fact that she first had the boldness to say, "Have my people go into slavery and not be killed" is a request to resend an official order of the king. Once one takes the first step to do something bold, the next step is always a lot easier.
  - c) You can sense the hatred of Haman she had here. (This calls for another Haman boo. ☺)
    - i) She doesn't say Haman the prime minister. She says the Haman the adversary, the enemy and the man who is vile. I haven't studied the original Hebrew language here, but my guess is the English language is easing up on her anger.
  - d) Before we continue, stop and think how the king must react to this statement. Here is the man he trusts most in the world, being called an enemy by the queen. We're about to read of the king leaving the room. I think it was too much for him to handle at the moment and the king needed to digest all of this before making any sort of decision.

23. Verse 6 (Part 2): Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen.<sup>7</sup> The king got up in a rage, left his wine and went out into the palace garden. But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life.
- a) Now let's think about all of this from Haman's perspective. Obviously he did not know that Esther was Jewish. He just got back from having to parade Mordecai around town. He had his own advisors tell him that things will end badly for him. I'm sure until this moment he was in a better mood as he was drinking with the king and queen.
    - i) Now he is terrified because he realizes that the king is favoring her over him. So here is Haman who ordered the destruction of the Jewish people begging for his life. Remember Esther was not only Jewish, but a relative of King Saul who many centuries earlier lost his role as king for failing to kill an Amalakite king. It is my guess that when Esther was young, Mordecai told her about great uncle Saul who lost his kingdom for failing to obey God and wipe out the Amalakites. Because of that failure, some of these Amalakites are alive today including Haman.
    - ii) My point is I'm guessing all of that went through her mind as he was begging for his life at that moment. At the very least, here was Esther, full of boldness to take a stand for God and now the enemy is asking, "Don't be so bold." With all of that courage running through Esther at this moment, Haman doesn't stand a chance.
  - b) In Verse 7, the king left the room to calm down. Let's now come back to the idea of how God is working behind the scenes to control things. I'm sure the king could have just said something hastily. Instead he smartly went outside to cool off. You can just see how God is working on His timing to control all of these events. In fact, even the fact that the king left the room will give an excuse he will need in order to kill Haman.
    - i) Remember that Haman was the prime minister. The king can't just give an order to have him killed. It was the king's own order that sealed the fate of the Jews. In other words, how can the king not be blamed when the order to have all of the Jews killed was given with his own "signature" (via the king's ring)?
    - ii) Luckily, God is still working on His timing, as we'll see in the next verse.
24. Verse 8: Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining. The king exclaimed, "Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?" As soon as the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.
- a) In the room where this banquet was, they were not sitting at a table eating. They were actually reclining on couches. I'm guessing servants brought food to them. I'm also speculating as Esther made her big speech she either sat up or stood up to yell at Haman.
  - b) After Esther let it out of her system, she was probably physically exhausted. That is why I picture her laying on the couch again. I then picture Haman getting off of his couch and kneeling in front of Esther to beg for his life. Am I positive it happened this way? No. However, that scenario would make sense given the events that just happened here and given how our bodies work, once we let go of what we are worried about.
  - c) With all of that said, while Haman is on his knees begging for his life, the king walks back in the room. Remember that if the king is going to order Haman to be killed, he is going to need a good reason. In effect the king is partially to blame for the order to kill all of the Jewish people because he "signed" the order. Therefore, he takes a look at Haman on his knees before Esther and says in effect, "Are you trying to molest my wife?"
    - i) The king now had an excuse to have Haman arrested. The issue for the king is how do I tell the public that I'm having my second in command put to death? In effect God provided the answer as it appears Haman is trying to molest the queen. Even if the king knew that it was not true, with the charge of assault of the queen, he now had the reason he needed to not be blamed for the death of Haman.
  - d) The last line mentions Haman's face being covered, a sign that one is marked for death.

25. Verse 9: Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said, "A gallows seventy-five feet high stands by Haman's house. He had it made for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king." The king said, "Hang him on it!" <sup>10</sup> So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's fury subsided.
- a) Harbona was mentioned once before back in Chapter 1. He was one of the king's seven personal assistants from that chapter. He had seen this seventy-five foot structure built outside of Haman's house. Let's face it, it is hard to miss something that big. I suspect the king has not been outside of the palace in the last day (the king was catching up on lost sleep ☺) and that is why he didn't know about the hanging structure.
    - i) To paraphrase, "Hey king you want Haman to die? Well, there is a really tall structure that stands right by Haman's house designed to kill someone. What do you say that Haman be killed on that structure? The king probably said, "Good idea". That would be a good public sign to warn to anyone who wants to try to attack the queen of the Persian Empire. I picture the king saying, "Go make it so."
    - ii) With the king now knowing that Haman was going to be killed in a violent way, the king's anger subsided.
  - b) That ends this three-chapter portion story. We still have the problem of the irrevocable order to kill all of the Jewish people. That is the subject for the next lesson and the last two chapters of the book of Esther.
26. Before I wrap this up, I want you to consider why God wants to work through people. Let's face it, if God wanted to, He could just "zap Haman dead" He wanted to, or something to that effect. The point is God chooses to work through people in order to get His will done. My point is His timing is not about getting our will done, but His. The reason He chooses to work through us is so that we have more reasons why we can be grateful for what He does for our lives.
27. Hopefully, one sees by now why it is best to cover these three short chapters in one lesson, as they are all part of the key plot to the story. More importantly, this three chapter lessons shows us how God works in the background on His timing if we are willing to trust Him.
- a) More importantly, it teaches us the importance about having and developing boldness in order to make a difference for Him. It shows the importance of praying for others and having others praying for us to have the boldness to make a difference for God.
28. Final question: The boldness to do what? I always assume my audience consists of those who already believe in Jesus. It is the matter of having the boldness to do something based on that belief. It could be as simple as getting involved in some ministry project at one's church. I'm a big believer in asking God here. Therefore, let me end my lesson with this related prayer:
- a) "OK, God if you want me to be bold for You, specifically what do you want me to do? Is there some specific project you want done, or do you just want me to just go keep going forward with what I have been doing? Make it obvious how I can make a difference for You today and guide me so that Your will be done. Further, I pray for the boldness for other believers so that they too, can work on Your timing to make that difference for You. Help me to see where You are working in the world so I can pray for the boldness of those people. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.