

ESTHER

7:1-8:17

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Taught at our Sunday evening service, 20th November 2022 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: Galatians 6:7-8

Good evening. Let's pray.

Introduction

This is the penultimate week in our verse by verse Bible study of the book of Esther. And in this incredible and true account of what happened in Iran some 2500 years ago, we see numerous examples of character - good and bad - that should serve as examples to us. And I would really encourage you to reflect on what *your* character is like. That is, don't just sit back and enjoy the story. This wasn't written so we could sit back with the popcorn and think "what a great story that is!", but rather as Paul said about all things we read in the Old Testament:

Romans 15:4

For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.

And indeed in the book of Esther we not only have these many things we can *learn* about character, but as we see God working behind the scenes to save the Jews from what seemed an impossible situation, we also can have *hope* that our unchanging God is also working behind the scenes in our lives. Let me put it another way - ignore the Old Testament to your detriment.

Overview of Esther

Now, before we get stuck into chapters 7 & 8 this evening, let's remind ourselves of the overall picture of what happens in this book:

- Chapter 1 (22 verses) - The King removes Vashti as Queen
- Chapter 2 (23 verses) - Esther is made Queen, while Mordecai uncovers a plot
- Chapter 3 (15 verses) - Haman plots against the Jews
- Chapter 4 (17 verses) - Esther agrees to help the Jews
- Chapter 5 (14 verses) - Esther sets a banquet while Haman plots against Mordecai
- Chapter 6 (14 verses) - The King can't sleep and Mordecai is honoured
- Chapter 7 (10 verses) - Haman's plot is unveiled but he is killed instead
- Chapter 8 (17 verses) - Haman's plot against the Jews is reversed
- Chapter 9 (32 verses) - The Jews overcome their enemies
- Chapter 10 (3 verses) - Mordecai's position remembered

Overview of chapter seven

Breaking chapter seven down we'll see:

- v1-2 - Esther's second banquet
- v3-8 - Haman's plot exposed
- v9-10 - Haman's end

Overview of chapter eight

Then in chapter eight we'll see:

- v1-2 - Favour shown to Esther and Mordecai
- v3-6 - Esther makes a further plea
- v7-17 - The plan to save the Jews

Recap of chapters five & six

Now previously in chapters five and six, we saw Haman's pride and Mordecai's humility contrasted. While Haman preened himself, boasting to his wife and friends about his greatness, Mordecai had to our knowledge never complained at lack of reward for saving the king's life. But finally Mordecai's actions are recognised, and we see Haman's ego hurt in the most public way, as he has to honour Mordecai at the king's command in the way he himself thought he should be honoured - indeed he personally has to parade him through the city on the king's horse, in the king's clothes, declaring "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honour!"

And almost as soon as he had returned home mourning and explaining to his wife and friends all that had happened, the king's eunuchs came to take him to the banquet with the King and Queen Esther, no doubt still wrestling with all that just happened (indeed we're not told that Haman was even given a reason why the king wanted to honour Mordecai).

Chapter seven

And so we read in verse 1 of chapter 7...

Esther 7:1

So the king and Haman went to dine with Queen Esther.

Esther had been bold, risking her life to come before the king unannounced, which had resulted in an open door with the promise of anything from the king – up to half the kingdom. So, she invited the king to a banquet, so that Haman would also be present as she made her plea.

At that first banquet the king repeats his offer, and we don't know why from Esther's perspective she doesn't make her plea there and then, but we see God's providence in that it is *that* night the king won't be able to sleep and is subsequently reminded of Mordecai's actions that had saved his life (without which I think Mordecai would likely not have been promoted to the place of honour we see in chapter 8). So whether nerves or a nudge from God saying "not yet", Esther's delay is helpful, and is followed by the king repeating his offer once more...

Esther 7:2

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!"

This really is an open door – a blank cheque if you like (for those who remember what one of those is!). And indeed we can pray for God to open doors in other contexts in our lives – from job opportunities, to ways to begin difficult but needful conversations, and especially in sharing the gospel. Paul asked the Colossians for exactly that:

Colossians 4:2-4

Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.

And Esther uses this opportunity...

Esther 7:3-4

Then Queen Esther answered and said, "If I have found favour in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. 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."

This is breaking news to the king (and to Haman), for Mordecai had most wisely told Esther, when she was first taken to the king's palace (thus before she was the queen), to not reveal that she was a Jew. And evidently she had kept this to herself.

And so, husbands, imagine how you would feel if your wife said "both I and my family have been sold, and sentenced to death". There is no good way to hear that. And now further imagine the king's position here – he has absolute authority over the kingdom that spanned not just more than one country – but 3 continents! How could someone do this without him knowing?

Esther 7:5

So King Ahasuerus answered and said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who would dare presume in his heart to do such a thing?"

The king sees it as absolute arrogance that someone would even think about doing this to his wife and her countrymen.

Esther 7:6

And Esther said, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!" So Haman was terrified before the king and queen.

It seems that Haman hadn't realised before now that Esther was talking about what *he* had done! And in this moment, the panic sets in. None of us have been in this exact position of course – and hopefully nothing close to it – but picture that brief moment of panic you have as you're driving on the motorway and you see the blue flashing lights of a police car appear behind you – and you tense up, check your speed and worry that it's you they are after! Or as you walk out of a shop or the supermarket and the theft alarm goes off – you know you're not stealing anything, but there's that slight pause in your step, that slight worry everyone is going to turn and look at you! Well here, Haman is guilty, and he knows it. And I can imagine the king turns and looks at him, and Haman doesn't know what to do. There is nowhere for him to hide – he is in severe trouble.

Esther 7:7

Then the king arose in his wrath from the banquet of wine and went into the palace garden; but Haman stood before Queen Esther, pleading for his life, for he saw that evil was determined against him by the king.

The king is furious. Furious with Haman, yes. But perhaps angry with himself too - for it was he that entrusted Haman with such power, and it was he that agreed to Haman's request to kill the Jews without asking who these people were, and who it would affect. As he's walking around the garden maybe he's thinking "I can't believe I was so stupid to let this happen".

Meanwhile inside, Haman pleads for his life. *His* life. We see no mention from him of the millions of people he has arranged the genocide of. No apology or contrition that he had implemented a law that required the queen to be killed. This is self preservation alone. And so he begs the queen to spare *his* life. We already know Haman was full of pride, and it's good to remember that *I* is always at the centre of pride! It's always about what *I* want.

And now the king, having taken moment to gather his thoughts, returns into the palace. We read...

Esther 7:8

When the king returned from the palace garden to the place of the banquet of wine, Haman had fallen across the couch where Esther was. Then the king said, "Will he also assault the queen while I am in the house?"

As the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.

Now, when we read the word *couch* (here in the NKJV) we tend to think of something we'd buy from DFS or Sofa World, whereas the KJV translates this as *bed*. The context of where and when this is all taking place helps us make sense of this - one commentator notes that at this time in Persia it was their custom to recline on couches while dining, so perhaps more of a chaise longues - a chair that is long enough to support the legs of the sitter.

And now as the king walks back in he finds Haman, begging for his life, had gotten too close to Esther for his comfort - perhaps for hers too - and he is outraged. And his eunuchs, reading the situation cover Haman's face - in essence they arrest him.

Esther 7:9

Now Harbonah, one of the eunuchs, said to the king, "Look! The gallows, fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai, who spoke good on the king's behalf, is standing at the house of Haman."

Then the king said, "Hang him on it!"

Remember Haman had built these gallows at least 75 feet high (50 cubits) - and not only were they visible from the palace, but evidently it had also become known that Haman had built them to hang Mordecai on.

Proverbs 26:27 says:

Proverbs 26:27

Whoever digs a pit will fall into it,
And he who rolls a stone will have it roll back on him.

And likewise, Haman, in wanting everyone to see Mordecai hung, will now be hung himself.

Esther 7:10

So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's wrath subsided.

Within 10 verses Haman has gone from attending a banquet to being hung to death.

The reality though is that his actions were leading toward this for some time. And so it often is with our sin, right? We persist in sin, and then are surprised when our lives, or even part of them, unravels all at once. We should not be surprised. Moses warned the tribes of Reuben and Gad about their conduct, saying:

Numbers 32:23

But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the LORD; and be sure your sin will find you out.

And of course we see that play out in Acts chapter 5 where Ananias and Sapphira sell some land, give part of the proceeds to the apostles, but state they are giving everything they received. Within hours, both of them were dead, struck down by the Lord for their barefaced lie to Him.

The apostle Paul later warned the Christians in Galatia:

Galatians 6:7-8

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.

But listen up – the issue is not just about you. Any sin present in your life affects others. It affects your family. And it affects this church. You will hopefully recall that back in Joshua chapter 7 we saw the account of Achan, who, disobeying the Lord's instruction spoken through Joshua, and took idols from the city of Jericho and hid them under his tent. He had sinned, he had hidden it, and probably thought he'd got away with it. But those actions led directly to Israel's defeat in their next battle for the city of Ai. As a result of his sin, a battle was lost, and people died.

So what about you then? What's going on in your life right now? Statistically at least, there are people in this church who watch pornography on a regular basis. What about getting drunk? What about drugs? What about telling crass jokes? Are you dishonouring God in your friendships, relationships, your family life, your conduct at work, or what you watch for entertainment? Both singles *and* married folk – is there purity in your life?

Some of you will have seen the Christian film titled *Fireproof*. It's an excellent film. But something that has left a lasting impression on me is their attitude in filming it. When putting together the team – actors and other contributors – that would make the film, they asked each person "is there anything going on in your life at the moment that could cause God to remove His hand from this project?". And several people said yes, and took no further part.

So let me ask you directly – is there anything going on in *your* life right now, that could cause God to remove His hand from this church, or any ministry therein? If the answer is yes, you need to deal with that now – not only for your own sake, but for the sake of others too.

In the case of Haman, he lived wickedly, and at the exact point where he thought he had made it – his sin was exposed, and he was hung immediately. Let that be a warning to us all not to play with sin.

Chapter eight

With Haman dead, we might think that is the end of the story, however, there was still the problem of the law that he had put in place, requiring the genocide of the Jewish people a matter of months from now. And this was a law that couldn't be changed. Chapter eight then, tells us what happens to counteract Haman's plan. We read...

Esther 8:1

On that day King Ahasuerus gave Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her.

At lot has happened in the 2 days covered by chapters 5-7: the Queen goes to see the king, the king and Haman attend a banquet, Haman boasts to his wife and friends, the king can't sleep, Mordecai is honoured, Haman mourns, attends a second banquet with the King and Queen, his plot is exposed and then he is killed. And now Esther, having revealed she was Jewish, informs the king of her background – that having been orphaned, her older cousin, Mordecai (who had also saved the king's life), had raised her lovingly as a daughter...

Esther 8:2

So the king took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai; and Esther appointed Mordecai over the house of Haman.

So Mordecai now assumes the place that Haman had – that is in essence the prime minister of the land. While that is wonderful recognition for Mordecai, the problem remains that both he and Esther, and all Jews, were facing certain death. So Esther acts once more, doing the opposite to Haman in that she doesn't merely plead for her life, but for the lives of her people.

Esther 8:3

Now Esther spoke again to the king, fell down at his feet, and implored him with tears to counteract the evil of Haman the Agagite, and the scheme which he had devised against the Jews.

Once again, we're reminded of Satan's intent to annihilate the Jews - on this occasion attempted through Haman who was an Amalekite, called an Agagite here after Agag who was king of the Amalekites. We looked at the significance of that when studying chapter 3.

Esther 8:4-6

And the king held out the golden sceptre toward Esther. So Esther arose and stood before the king, and said, "If it pleases the king, and if I have found favour in his sight and the thing seems right to the king and I am pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to annihilate the Jews who are in all the king's provinces. For how can I endure to see the evil that will come to my people? Or how can I endure to see the destruction of my countrymen?"

Esther wasn't after revenge against Haman, but salvation for her people. Contrast that to Haman who wanted revenge against Mordecai, and destruction of his people.

Esther 8:7

Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and Mordecai the Jew, "Indeed, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows because he tried to lay his hand on the Jews.

This indicates the king had no hard feelings toward the Jews. And now he says...

Esther 8:8

You yourselves write a decree concerning the Jews, as you please, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's signet ring; for whatever is written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet ring no one can revoke."

Another blank cheque is written. This is extreme favour. And while the first decree cannot be reversed, they are permitted to make another one.

Esther 8:9

So the king's scribes were called at that time, in the third month, which is the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third day; and it was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded, to the Jews, the satraps, the governors, and the princes of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, one hundred and twenty-seven provinces in all, to every province in its own script, to every people in their own language, and to the Jews in their own script and language.

So here, just a little more than 2 months after the writing of Haman's decree, Mordecai now sanctions this second one to be sent to all provinces in the kingdom. Exactly how long this took to organise we don't know, but it was surely much work - maybe more than 100 languages to translate to, and zero photocopiers or printers!

Esther 8:10

And he wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, sealed it with the king's signet ring, and sent letters by couriers on horseback, riding on royal horses bred from swift steeds.

It seems there is some urgency to this, and for good reason, for as we'll see in the next verses, there was now preparation for the Jewish people to do in the coming 9 months or so before the first decree was to be carried out. And these letters are sent out via first class post - either by fast camels or horses based on the original text, though of course the Persians were well known for their love of horses. And we read...

Esther 8:11-12

By these letters the king permitted the Jews who were in every city to gather together and protect their lives—to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people or province that would assault them, both little children and women, and to plunder their possessions, on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar.

The original law is not changed at all, for even the king could not change it - in the same way as another law at another time couldn't be changed to keep Daniel out of the lions den. But now the Jews are permitted not only to protect themselves in response to that law, but to actively pursue and kill all those who were against them. And this account continues...

Esther 8:13

A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province and published for all people, so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.

Again, this is about the Jews being prepared for their enemies.

Esther 8:14

The couriers who rode on royal horses went out, hastened and pressed on by the king's command. And the decree was issued in Shushan the citadel.

There wasn't any procrastination going on here! And we read...

Esther 8:15

So Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, with a great crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple; and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad.

Mordecai was highly honoured at this stage, wearing the same colours as the curtains at the king's luxurious feast in chapter one (I assume that his clothes weren't made out of those curtains!) in complete contrast to the sackcloth and ashes he was wearing in chapter 4 when the first decree was published.

And similarly, the reaction of all those in the city both Jews and gentiles alike, was one of rejoicing, in contrast to how previously the gentiles were perplexed, and the Jews wept when they received news of that first decree.

The closing verses of this chapter say:

Esther 8:16-17

The Jews had light and gladness, joy and honour. And in every province and city, wherever the king's command and decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a holiday. Then many of the people of the land became Jews, because fear of the Jews fell upon them.

We'll see in chapter 9 next week how this holiday became an annual remembrance of this deliverance, in the Feast of Purim.

But as we gather our thoughts after all we've seen in this book of Esther so far, let us consider the striking similarities of this historical account to the gospel, for as with the Jews here in this book, there was also one who was filled with pride that was set on *our* destruction, who accuses us before the King. Likewise, we had a law written against us, requiring *our* death - and there was *nothing* we could do to save ourselves. But rather, it required a Jew to be willing to lay down their life, and a king to show mercy to his bride.

Also in a similar way, while salvation would be declared in advance, this would take place at the time of the passover celebration. Furthermore, the old law against us could not be changed and was not done away with, yet now there was to be a defence that would save our lives. And that defence would come through the One sat at the right hand of the King, with the authority of the King.

Furthermore, not only would that defence save our lives, but bring additional blessing, even in a land that is not our home. What a similar, yet even more miraculous salvation we have!

Paul writes to the Christians in Colosse:

Colossians 2:13-15

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

The word gospel means *good news*. And what good news this is!! As such, there should be one additional similarity in our story, to that which we read here in Esther. For we read of what great joy there was at their salvation from the hand of Haman. So we should be almost speechless at what God has done for us in sending Jesus to die in our place that we might be saved. Let's look at 1 Peter chapter 1 which we've recently studied on Sunday mornings...

1 Peter 1:6-9

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honour, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.

The last reaction we should have is, "meh - that's nice". We should desire to praise God in prayer, in song, and in all areas of our lives, for as long as we shall live.

And like in Esther we see many people of the land became Jews, so should we desire that many in our land come to know Jesus as their Saviour.

Application questions

Consider these questions as you go into this week:

- Are we concerned about our own wellbeing alone, or that of others?
- Is there sin in our lives that we need to deal with?
- Are we rejoicing in our salvation as much as we should?

Let's pray.