

Unit II: God Promises a Just Kingdom

Justice Prevails

DEVOTIONAL READING: Luke 19:11-26

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Esther 3; 5; 7

PRINT PASSAGE: Esther 7:1-10

Key Verse—They hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king’s wrath pacified. (Esther 7:10, KJV)

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They impaled Haman on the pole he had set up for Mordecai. Then the king’s fury subsided. (Esther 7:10, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Explicate the story of Esther as a triumph of justice.
- Sense that treachery will not win.
- Commit to acting justly in every situation with the assurance that good triumphs over evil.

*Key Terms

Eunuchs (verse 9)—Hebrew: *saris* (saw-reece’): “chamberlains” (KJV); court officers.

Gallows (verse 9)—Hebrew: *’ets* (āts): planks; sticks; wood; it is a structure on which to hang a criminal; “pole” (NIV).

Petition (verse 2)—Hebrew: *sheelah* or *shelah* (sheh-ay-law’): request; a thing asked for.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Introduction

Dorothy Love Coates penned the lyrics to the song “Holding On to My Faith” that would now be classified as “old-school gospel.” One of the verses goes, “When you dig one ditch, you better dig two. The trap you set just may be for you!” Implicit in these lyrics is a practical and theological message: the wicked will fall into their own nets (see Psalm 141:10). God’s Word has much to say about this principle. Proverbs 29:6 (NIV) states this explicitly: “Evildoers are snared by their own sin, but the righteous shout for joy and are glad.” Proverbs 26:27 (NIV) warns, “Whoever digs a pit will fall into it; if someone rolls a stone, it will roll back on them.” The psalmist declared, “They spread a net for my feet; my soul was despondent. They dug a pit for me, but they themselves have fallen into it” (see Psalm 57:6). These passages clearly teach that those who plan harm or misfortune for others may also fall victim to the same harm or misfortune. Our



The Biblical Context

The book of Esther is unique in Scripture because God's name is not mentioned in it. However, God's providence and faithfulness to His covenant promises to His people, the Jews, is quite evident in its content. Its name is derived from the principal character and is one of only two books in the Bible named for women. Esther was a young Jewish girl who became queen of the Persian Empire. An orphan, she was reared by her older cousin Mordecai. The human author of the book remains unknown, but Mordecai, Ezra, and Nehemiah have been suggested as possibilities. The events recorded in the book took place during the time of the officially approved migrations of the Jewish exiles back to Palestine and Jerusalem. Esther lived during the reign of Ahasuerus, the Hebrew transliteration of his Persian name, Khshayarsha, between 486 and 465 BC. He is also known as Xerxes I, the Greek representation of his name. The enacted drama of the book of Esther primarily focuses on Haman, a descendant of Agag king of the Amalekites killed by Samuel during the reign of Saul who was from the tribe of Benjamin. It is believed by some that Haman's intense hatred of Mordecai (also a Benjamite) and the Jews was the result of a centuries-old blood feud stemming from this event. Although He is not mentioned by name, God is seen working providentially in these events through Esther to keep His covenant promise to protect His people. We are also reminded that the schemes of the wicked become their own form of judgment and condemnation.

3 Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request.

4 "For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated. 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."

world is plagued by overt and covert intentional injustice. To the victims it may seem that the perpetrators appear to be getting away with their evil deeds, but God has the time set for them to reap what they have sown. One of the most vivid biblical examples of this is the account of the Jews' adversary Haman in the book of Esther. His plot to murder Mordecai and to annihilate the Jews in Persia backfired, and he fell victim to his own trap (see Esther 7:10).

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

A Plea for Justice (*Esther 7:1-4*)

KJV

SO THE king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen.

2 And the king said again unto Esther on the second day at the banquet of wine, What is thy *petition*, queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? and it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom.

3 Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request:

4 For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage.

NIV

SO THE king and Haman went to Queen Esther's banquet,

2 and as they were drinking wine on the 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."

Through her cousin Mordecai, Esther learned of Haman's plot to annihilate the Jews and devised a plan to intercede (see Esther 4). Meanwhile, Haman, incensed by Mordecai's intentional disregard for his royally appointed position, followed the advice of his wife and friends to build gallows on which to impale Mordecai once his plot was successfully executed. Esther's intervention plans involved hosting two banquets for Haman and the king, where she would make her request for the lives of her people (see 5:5b-6; 7:1). She deferred her official request to the second of the two banquets (**verse 1**). As he had previously done, the king asked Esther to present her request (**verse 2**). It is significant to note that he addressed her as "Queen Esther" rather than simply Esther. This recognition made it possible for her to make her request based on her royal position; it would carry more weight. Esther's response (**verse 3**) mirrors the two questions the king had asked and indicated that she had thoroughly planned her course of action. It also revealed her degree of respect for him, either as a person or his position of authority. Esther passionately gets to the point. She begs that her life and her people's lives be spared. Initially, she did not reveal that there was a man in his kingdom that wanted to kill off the Jews, but she wisely chose to focus on the fact that the queen's life and the lives of her people were in danger. She then reminded the king of the decree he had approved to annihilate the Jewish nation (**verse 4a**; see 3:13). It is not known if Ahasuerus knew her nationality prior to this point, but her revelation was enough for him to figure out that she was a Jew and he had unknowingly signed her death warrant. Esther called the king's attention to the bribe Haman offered the king and added that if she and her people were only going to be sold into slavery, she would not have troubled him at all (**verse 4b**). Esther's intervention on behalf of her people provides applicable principles for us when addressing difficult and unjust circumstances. These principles are prayer; acknowledging and respecting those in authority; following appropriate protocol; and developing and following a thoroughly prepared plan of action.

? **What Do You Think?** How could Esther's intervention strategy be used to address an unjust situation in your local environment?

Injustice Exposed (*Esther 7:5-8*)

KJV

5 Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?

6 And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.

7 And the king arising from the banquet of wine in his wrath went into the palace garden: and Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen; for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king.

8 Then the king returned out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine; and Haman was fallen upon the bed whereon Esther was. Then said the king, Will he force the queen also before me in the house? As the word went out of king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.

NIV

5 King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, “Who is he? Where is he—the man who has dared to do such a thing?”

6 Esther said, “An adversary and enemy! This vile Haman!” Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen.

7 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.

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.

The king’s response to Esther’s revelation was explosive. He wanted the identity of the man responsible for this plot to be revealed immediately (**verse 5**). Esther identified the man as Haman and exposed him as wicked, a traitor to the king, and the enemy of the Jews (**verse 6**). Haman was terrified, and rightly so. He was now viewed as the enemy of the king and his queen. Haman had become the victim of his own evil scheming. Ahasuerus left the banquet hall in a rage (**verse 7a**), leaving Esther and Haman together. Why he left is not explained in the text and is left to speculation. Realizing that the only possible way of escape was to plead with Esther for his life, Haman fell on the couch where she was reclining (**verse 8a**). How ironic that at one time Haman was furious because a Jew would not bow before him; but now he was bowing before one, begging for his life. Observing this scene upon his return to the banquet hall, Ahasuerus accused Haman of attempting to molest his queen, a capital crime with an automatic sentence of death. Immediately, Haman’s face was covered by the guards present in the banquet hall, apparently an act in preparation for execution (**verse 8b**). The plotter of evil was now the victim, fatally snared by his own evil deeds. As we have heard, be careful who you step on while on the way up, because you may have to face those same people on the way down. The once proud and arrogant Haman was now the humiliated and condemned Haman. All that is evil and unjust will eventually be exposed, divinely judged, and eliminated. We must remain mindful of the temptation to think more highly of ourselves than we should at the expense of others.

 **What Do You Think?** What examples have you witnessed of schemers becoming victims of their schemes?

Justice Triumphs (*Esther 7:9-10*)

KJV

9 And Harbonah, one of the *chamberlains*, said before the king, Behold also, the *gallows* fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who spoken good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman. Then the king said, Hang him thereon.

10 So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king’s wrath pacified.

NIV

9 Then Harbona, one of the *eunuchs* attending the king, said, “A *pole* reaching to a height of fifty cubits stands by Haman’s house. He had it set up for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king.” The king said, “Impale him on it!”

10 So they impaled Haman on the pole he had set up for Mordecai. Then the king’s fury subsided.

“He who leads the upright astray in an evil way will himself fall into his own pit, but the blameless will inherit good” (Proverbs 28:10, NASB). This is an appropriate assessment of Haman’s predicament. His previous boasting and plan for Mordecai’s demise had now become the method of his own execution as a traitor. Apparently, he had boasted about his plan to kill Mordecai and the palace servants were aware of it. Harbona, one of the eunuchs in the palace, called the king’s attention to the towering gallows (about 75 feet high) Haman constructed in front of his house on which to execute Mordecai (**verse 9a**). Haman had tricked and manipulated the king in plotting to kill his queen and her people, and was accused of attempting to molest the queen and of planning to execute the man that the king had just recognized for his loyalty to him and the kingdom. Without hesitation, the king commanded that Haman be hanged, literally impaled, on his own gallows—and the sentence was immediately carried out (**verse 10**). Justice was ultimately achieved. Both Haman and Mordecai were elevated: Haman on the tower of death and Mordecai to a high position of a royal officer. The lesson here is, “The righteous is delivered from trouble, and it comes to the wicked instead” (Proverbs 11:8, NKJV). That is good news, but also a warning to heed. We must be careful of what we sow because we will reap what is sown (see Galatians 6:7). This principle applies to the saved as well as the unsaved. Religious activity without the direction of the Holy Spirit can become the source of unjust practices even among believers. The responsibility is for them to intentionally sow righteousness and the principles of justice while the opportunity presents itself.

 **What Do You Think?** How does Psalm 9:15-16 illustrate the principle of “sowing and reaping” taught in this lesson?

A Closing Thought

This lesson teaches that evil does not prevail forever. In God’s own time, He will ensure that justice for all will be established. We are also reminded that those who scheme to set traps for others are setting themselves up to be ensnared by those same traps.

Your Life

The principle of “sowing and reaping” does not only apply to doing evil, but also to doing good (see Galatians 6:8). Determine to do a good deed or give a word of encouragement to someone experiencing difficulty this week for God’s glory. You will reap a harvest of blessings. Nothing done for Him is ever forgotten or ever goes unnoticed.

Your World!

Our world is filled with Hamans among humankind. The community of faith is challenged to gain strength from the example of Esther and Mordecai to stand against injustice perpetuated by

these modern Hamans. We are assured by the outcome of Esther's story that justice will eventually prevail over injustice.

 **Closing Prayer** Father, we are encouraged to know that good will triumph over evil. As we praise You for this truth, renew our resolve to join You in Your mission to establish a just kingdom by championing justice and confronting injustice locally, nationally, and globally. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion (Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Next week's lesson will continue the theme of justice prevailing over injustice. Through Isaiah, we will be reminded that the righteous will be vindicated, and their unjust oppressors punished for their actions.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY , April 20	"Solomon Makes a Just Decision"	(1 Kings 3:16-28)
TUESDAY , April 21	"Jesus Issues His Platform for Justice"	(Luke 4:14-21)
WEDNESDAY , April 22	"The Year of Jubilee Established"	(Leviticus 25:8-17)
THURSDAY , April 23	"A Light to the Nations"	(Isaiah 49:1-7)
FRIDAY , April 24	"A New Vision for the People"	(Isaiah 61:1-7)
SATURDAY , April 25	"Zion Welcomes the Redeemed Home"	(Isaiah 62:5-12)
SUNDAY , April 26	"The Lord Brings the People Justice"	(Isaiah 61:8-11; 62:2-4a)

Notes
