

SESSION 5

STAND UP AND SPEAK

The Point

Be bold, but leave the results to God.

The Passage

Esther 7:1-10

The Bible Meets Life

Too many people want to deal with wrongs against themselves or others by being the judge, jury, and executioner. These roles have never been given to Christians; rather, we serve the One who is the ultimate Judge. Our role is that of a witness, to expose the wrong and point to the right. God calls us to be witnesses to His truth and what is right.

The Setting

Haman constructed a gallows on which he planned to hang Mordecai. Meanwhile, the king experienced a restless night and requested the daily record book read to him. He learned Mordecai had been instrumental in saving the king from an assassination attempt. Because Mordecai had received no recognition for his act, Ahasuerus commanded Haman to honor this Jew. Following that humbling experience, Haman rushed to the banquet Esther had prepared for the king and him.

What does the Bible say?

Gallows (7:10)—This term literally means “tree” and designates a stake or pole on which the Persians impaled the individuals they executed.

Esther 7:1-10 (CSB)

¹ The king and Haman came to feast with Esther the queen. ² Once again, on the second day while drinking wine, the king asked Esther, “Queen Esther, whatever you ask will be given to you. Whatever you seek, even to half the kingdom, will be done.” ³ Queen Esther answered, “If I have found favor in your eyes, Your Majesty, and if the king is pleased, spare my life; this is my request. And spare my people; this is my desire. ⁴ For my people and I have been sold to destruction, death, and extermination. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept silent. Indeed, the trouble wouldn’t be worth burdening the king.” ⁵ King Ahasuerus spoke up and asked Queen Esther, “Who is this, and where is the one who would devise such a scheme?” ⁶ Esther answered, “The adversary and enemy is this evil Haman.” Haman stood terrified before the king and queen.

⁷ The king arose in anger and went from where they were drinking wine to the palace garden. Haman remained to beg Queen Esther for his life because he realized the king was planning something terrible for him.

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, “Would he actually violate the queen while I am in the house?” As soon as the statement left the king’s mouth, they covered Haman’s face. ⁹ Harbona, one of the king’s eunuchs, said: “There is a gallows seventy-five feet tall at Haman’s house that he made for Mordecai, who gave the report that saved the king.” The king said, “Hang him on it.”

¹⁰ They hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king’s anger subsided.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Esther 7:1-6 (CSB)

¹ The king and Haman came to feast with Esther the queen. ² Once again, on the second day while drinking wine, the king asked Esther, “Queen Esther, whatever you ask will be given to you. Whatever you seek, even to half the kingdom, will be done.” ³ Queen Esther answered, “If I have found favor in your eyes, Your Majesty, and if the king is pleased, spare my life; this is my request. And spare my people; this is my desire. ⁴ For my people and I have been sold to destruction, death, and extermination. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept silent. Indeed, the trouble wouldn’t be worth burdening the king.” ⁵ King Ahasuerus spoke up and asked Queen Esther, “Who is this, and where is the one who would devise such a scheme?” ⁶ Esther answered, “The adversary and enemy is this evil Haman.” Haman stood terrified before the king and queen.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Esther 7:1-6.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 115): In Esther 6, we learn that God already had been at work. King Ahasuerus had spent a sleepless night. Surely this was not mere coincidence, but insomnia brought about by God. In that moment of sleeplessness, the king had daily reports read to him and he heard of Mordecai’s unheralded act of heroism in thwarting the plan to assassinate the king (Esther 6:1-3). Perhaps shamed by his failure to properly reward Mordecai, the king instructed Haman to honor Mordecai—the very person Haman despised (vv. 4-11).

- » In chapter 7, we find the king, Haman, and Esther seated at their second banquet. The events of the last few days—the planning, the praying, the fasting—all came down to this moment, this ultimate act of courage. It was time to expose all, and Esther did just that, revealing both her Jewish identity and Haman’s evil plans.
- » King Ahasuerus learned that both his wife and the man he had just honored were scheduled to die—and the man sitting at the table with him was the one who had devised the scheme.
- » Esther appealed to the king to spare the lives of the Jews who had been sentenced to death. Haman had been exposed, and he was “terrified” (v. 6).

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 115 of the PSG: **“What do you find interesting about the way Esther handled this situation?”**

Esther 7:1-6 Commentary

Verse 1: In chapter 6, the suspense increases as King Ahasuerus endured a sleepless night. He did what kings did in those days to cure insomnia. Ahasuerus ordered that the book recording daily events in the kingdom be read to him. God's providential hand designed that the reading included an occasion when Mordecai had saved the king from being assassinated by two of his guards. When Ahasuerus learned nothing had been done to recognize Mordecai for his act, the king asked Haman what should be done for the man the king wanted to honor. Arrogantly assuming the king wanted to honor him, Haman responded that the esteemed individual should receive royal treatment. Imagine Haman's shock when Ahasuerus commanded him to honor Mordecai as Haman had suggested! Haman honored Mordecai as the king commanded. As the chapter ends, the king's servants rushed Haman to the second banquet Esther had prepared. So the king and Haman dined with Esther.

Verse 2: Just as he had at the preceding day's banquet (see Esther 5:6), the king again asked Esther to state her request. While drinking wine, typically served at the end of the meal, Ahasuerus asked to know Esther's petition. Again the king stated that his queen would receive whatever she sought, even to half the kingdom. This phrase evidently was a formality or an example of cultural courtesy. It indicated that the king favorably received Esther. It expressed Ahasuerus's generosity, but it was not intended to be taken literally.

Verse 3: At this time Esther voiced her real request. She courageously took a stand and spoke. The queen began her petition courteously and formally, using court etiquette. She addressed the king as "Your Majesty," literally "O, king." Esther did not presume upon Ahasuerus's goodwill. Yet she made her appeal direct and to the point. We've previously encountered the Hebrew term translated "favor" in the Book of Esther (2:15; 5:2,8). This word comes from a root word meaning "to be gracious" or "to show favor." Inherent in the word is the concept of experiencing acceptance. The expression "found favor in your eyes" often occurs in biblical contexts dealing with the relationship of a superior to one regarded as inferior, such as the relationship of a king to his subject. However, the focus is typically on the receiver rather than on the giver. The term also can be translated "charm."

The supreme moment of risk and revelation had come. In petitioning the king for her people's lives, Esther identified herself with them. She pleaded with the king to spare both her life and her people's lives. The two pleas were inseparably linked.

Ahasuerus must have been stunned and startled at Esther's words. He no doubt wondered why Esther's life was in danger. Nevertheless Esther proceeded with her heroic response.



STUDY THE BIBLE

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ALTERNATE QUESTION:

When have you felt compelled to advocate for or against an issue? What motivated you?

 Racial Discrimination	 Human Trafficking
 Abuse	 Abortion
 Bullying	 Hunger/Poverty
Where is God leading you to stand up to injustice?	

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Esther 7:1-6 (CSB) (Continued)

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 116): Esther exposed this dark deed with great boldness, but she also did it with wisdom.

- » Esther didn't point the finger of blame at the king, though King Ahasuerus had unwittingly signed her death warrant. She appealed both to his innocence and his self-interest. The destruction of the Jews would mean wiping out a part of the work force and economy, spelling great financial loss for the king.
- » Esther spoke on behalf of others. She didn't simply advocate for her own life—she spoke up for all her people.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 116 of the PSG: **“What are some fears that often hinder us from speaking out against the darkness around us?”**

SAY: “Esther could have simply kept silent. Instead, she used the opportunity before her to give a voice to her people. In the process, she gave us a great example of living out Paul’s words: ‘Don’t participate in the fruitless works of darkness, but instead expose them’ (Ephesians 5:11).”

LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item #11**, “Fight Injustice” poster. Ask, “Which of these issues of injustice do you see present in our culture?” Allow time for responses. Use this discussion as a lead-in to the “Take a Stand” activity.

DO: Place group members into subgroups of three or four people each. Invite subgroups to complete the activity on page 119 of the PSG together. If time allows, invite volunteers to share their responses aloud.

TAKE A STAND:

- » Which of the following injustices are present around you? Circle all that apply. (Note: The PSG includes the following list: Racial discrimination, Human trafficking, Abortion, Abuse, Bullying, and Other.)
- » In the space below, list one or two things you can do about these issues individually.
- » In the space below, list one or two things your group can do to stand up for justice on these issues.

Esther 7:1-6 Commentary *(Continued)*

Verse 4: Without pausing to wait for the king to speak, Esther continued her entreaty. She identified her people and herself as having been sold. The queen used the passive voice in stating what had happened. She wisely did not implicate the king although Ahasuerus had authorized the Jews' destruction (see 3:9-11). Esther piled up words to describe the fate to which she and her people had been assigned—"destruction, death, and extermination." In the original Hebrew language these same three words formed part of Haman's decree recorded in Esther 3:13, although the CSB translators have rendered them "destroy, kill, and annihilate" in that earlier passage. Hearing these same words surely triggered a reminder of the decree Haman had crafted and the king had authorized. By this point, Ahasuerus must have realized the significance of Esther's speech.

Repeating the same three verbs Haman had employed in his decree, Esther subtly called the king's attention to the individual responsible for attempting to destroy her people and her. Furthermore, the threefold repetition of the same thought signaled completeness. Thus the focus falls on Haman's desire to totally exterminate the Jews. Sensitive to the king's power and perspective, Esther tactfully added that if it had simply been a matter of selling her people as slaves rather than destroying them, she would not have bothered Ahasuerus with this matter. She would not have spoken up.

Verse 5: The king's questions reveal his sense of outrage. The phrase rendered "would devise such a scheme" is literally "has filled his heart to do so." The heart represented the seat of the will or the center of decision-making. Thus when Haman filled his heart to destroy the Jews, he decided to get rid of these people (see Acts 5:3). Did the king regard the plot to kill the Jews that also included Queen Esther as a personal affront? Did he ignore his complicity in the matter? Did Ahasuerus think he had been duped into agreeing to the Jews' destruction? When Haman sought the king's approval on an order to destroy the Jews, he did not mention them by name. Thus the king may have been unaware of the complete contents of the decree he had signed. In any case, the earlier plot on the king's life had been foiled by a Jew—Mordecai. Here the plot on the queen's life was foiled by another Jew—Esther herself.

Verse 6: Esther replied boldly and succinctly to the king's inquiry: "The adversary and enemy is this evil Haman." Esther utilized three words to describe him: "adversary," "enemy," and "evil." Esther made her case clearly and strongly. In taking her stand before Ahasuerus, Esther spoke boldly. In contrast, Haman "stood terrified before the king and queen." He responded appropriately for Esther had unmasked his evil deed. In announcing Haman as the enemy, Esther also revealed that she was a Jew. Her words sealed Haman's fate. No wonder he felt doomed.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Esther 7:7-10 (CSB)

⁷ The king arose in anger and went from where they were drinking wine to the palace garden. Haman remained to beg Queen Esther for his life because he realized the king was planning something terrible for him. 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, "Would he actually violate the queen while I am in the house?" As soon as the statement left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. ⁹ Harbona, one of the king's eunuchs, said: "There is a gallows seventy-five feet tall at Haman's house that he made for Mordecai, who gave the report that saved the king." The king said, "Hang him on it." ¹⁰ They hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's anger subsided.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Esther 7:7-10.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 117): History records that King Ahasuerus was well-known for his nasty temper and rage. At times, he could be an unstable, vindictive, and irrational decision-maker. Consider how easily he tossed out Queen Vashti because she refused to be paraded in front of others (Esther 1:10-21), and how haphazardly he signed onto Haman's Jewish genocide plan (3:7-14). Despite a history of rash decisions, King Ahasuerus made the right choice in this moment. He determined to sentence Haman to death, and soon the king would also empower the Jews to stand against those who sought to harm them.

SAY: "One thing we learn from Esther's story is that injustice is nothing new. And, with today's around-the-clock news coverage, we don't have to look far to see injustice in our own culture. Still, we want to see the wrong righted and justice served. We do what we can on behalf of others, but we must leave any vengeance in the hands of God."

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 117 of the PSG: "What makes it hard to leave vengeance in God's hands?"

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 118 of the PSG: "Where do we have opportunities to be bold about justice in our community?" (Note: For this discussion, refer back to the items your group identified in the "Take a Stand" activity.)

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
In what current situation do you need the courage of Esther?

Esther 7:7-10 Commentary

Verse 7: Too late Haman realized he had made Ahasuerus angry. The Hebrew word rendered “anger” also portrays Haman’s rage toward Mordecai in Esther 5:9. Why did Ahasuerus retreat to the palace garden? The text provides no explanation. When the king departed, Haman saw the handwriting on the wall. He remained with Esther to plead for his life. The tables had turned. Previously Esther the Jew pleaded for her life and her people’s lives because of Haman’s evil plot. Once his evil deed had been exposed, however, Haman pleaded for his life before Queen Esther. The Hebrew word translated “something terrible” literally means “evil.” In this context it conveys the sense of “calamity” that Ahasuerus was preparing for Haman.

Verse 8: Ahasuerus returned at the precise moment Haman fell on the couch where Esther reclined. Ancient Middle Eastern people reclined on couches at their feasts. Haman probably grabbed Esther’s feet and kissed them as he begged for mercy. Ironically, he who had demanded that Mordecai the Jew bow before him was groveling at the feet of Esther the Jew. In Persian custom, no men except the king and designated eunuchs were permitted within seven paces of women belonging to the king’s harem.

Haman’s timing couldn’t have been worse. As the king entered the room, he interpreted Haman’s act as an attempt to violate the queen. Ahasuerus’s response sealed Haman’s fate. The king’s statement does not refer to his question. The term refers to a judicial decree. The king pronounced the death sentence on Haman. Servants or court officials covered Haman’s face. The Greeks and Romans covered criminals’ faces before leading them away to execution. Although we cannot be certain, that may have been Persian practice as well.

Verse 9: Harbona, one of the king’s seven personal eunuchs (see Esther 1:10), immediately recalled the gallows Haman had constructed for Mordecai. He also remembered that Mordecai’s report had saved Ahasuerus’s life. Harbona’s words effectively served as another charge against Haman. The eunuch’s reminder that Haman had plotted the death of a man who had saved the king from an assassination attempt guaranteed Haman’s doom. Ahasuerus swiftly replied, “Hang him on it”

Verse 10: This verse calls to mind the biblical principle that we reap what we sow (see Proverbs 26:27; Galatians 6:7). The gallows Haman had built for Mordecai became the instrument of his own death. After Haman’s hanging, Ahasuerus’s anger or rage abated (see comments on Esther 7:7).

