



## A SERIES OF TWISTS AND TURNS

Esther 5-7

Unbelievers see in the events of life coincidences, fate, and luck. Those who know the God of the Bible recognize it is His hand at work in all things, assuring His promises are fulfilled and His will is done. Esther 5-7 gives us a glimpse of His behind-the-scenes activities.

In this historic drama in the book of Esther, so much of what happens next hangs on a sleepless night in the king's palace. As we begin here in chapter 5, we are going to try to keep up with all the surprising twists and turns.

After three days of fasting, Esther approaches the king as planned, at the risk of her own life. Her fears are put to rest, however, as verse 2 says, "She won favor in his sight, and he held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand."

He is evidently in a good mood because he promises to give her whatever she wants. But all she wants to do is to invite the king and Haman, his prime minister, to come to a private dinner.



Ruins of Susa

During her three-day fast, the wisdom of God obviously was at work in Esther's mind and heart. She formulated this plan to get the king and Haman alone with her and away from the public embarrassment that is going to come to the king when he discovers his own hand has effectively signed the queen's death warrant. At this point, neither the king nor Haman know that she is one of the Jewish people.

At this private banquet, the king asks Esther what she wants. She replies to him in verse 8, "Let the king and Haman come to the feast that I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said."

Was Esther paralyzed with fear at this moment? No, I personally believe God has providentially moved Esther to postpone making her request. You see, between this banquet and the next one, several things are going to transpire that set the stage for a dramatic deliverance.

For his part, Haman could not be prouder of himself. He has just been invited by the queen to a second private banquet. Verse 9 says:

*Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart. But when Ha-*



*man saw Mordecai . . . that he neither rose nor trembled before him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai.*

When Haman gets home, he recounts for his wife and friends how the king has promoted him and how the queen has invited him to her private banquets with the king.

But he adds here in verse 13, “Yet all this is worth nothing to me, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate.” Despite everything he is enjoying, he’s distracted by the hatred he carries toward the Jewish people—and this one Jewish man in particular.

Haman’s wife and friends advise him to build a gallows and then ask the king to let him hang Mordecai the next morning. That will get rid of Mordecai! Chapter 5 concludes by saying, “This idea pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made.”

So, Mordecai is surely going to hang the next day unless God does something during the night to save his life. And does God ever do something!

Chapter 6 tells us what happened next:

*On that night the king could not sleep. And he gave orders to bring the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles, and they were read before the king. (verse 1)*

The king can’t sleep, so he has someone read to him from the historical records. He assumes that will knock him right out. Yet providentially, the servant reads from a five-year-old report telling how Mordecai had discovered a plot to assassinate the king and relayed this information to Esther, saving the king’s life. Chapter 2 ended by giving us that brief account. But there’s more. The record indicates that Mordecai was never honored for his loyalty to the king.

*God doesn’t just deliver us from the problems of life; He develops us through the problems of life.*

So now it is early morning, and Haman arrives at the palace to petition the king to hang Mordecai.

But before Haman can speak, the king asks him, “What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?” (verse 6). Haman thinks the king is talking about him.

It sounds like Haman has given this some thought already, from his response in verses 8-9:

*“Let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and the horse that the king has ridden . . . lead him on the horse through the square of the city, proclaiming before him: ‘Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.’”*

Haman has to be thinking that with this public honor, along with the execution of Mordecai and another private banquet with the king and queen, this is going to be the best day of his life!

Can you imagine the shock when the king says to him in verse 10, “Hurry . . . do so to Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king’s gate”? This is the beginning of the *worst* day in his life!

Haman returns home to relate to his wife and friends how he had to honor Mordecai. They offer him no comfort at all. In fact, they warn him in verse 13, “If



Mordecai . . . is [truly] of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but will surely fall before him.” And with that fearful prediction, Haman heads to the palace for his second private banquet with the king and queen.

After dinner, the king again asks his wife what her request is. And now—at the perfect time in God’s plan—she answers here in chapter 7, verses 3-6:

*“Let my life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request. For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated.” . . . Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, “Who is he, and where is he, who has dared to do this?” And Esther said, “A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!”*

The truth is finally out. Haman is stunned to learn Esther is Jewish. The king is enraged and rushes out of the room to think about what to do next, while Haman pleads for his life from Esther. When the king comes back inside, he finds Haman falling on Esther’s couch.

Persian law allowed no man within seven paces of the queen. In fact, touching the king’s wife was punishable by death.<sup>1</sup>

The king sees Haman as being physically aggressive and says in verse 8, “Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?” One of the servants, steps forwards to reveal that Haman has just built a gallows on which to hang Mordecai, the man

who had saved the king’s own life. And that does it. Haman is taken out and hanged on that gallows.

What a series of twists and turns! And it all reveals the hand of the master-mover of human history—our sovereign, unseen God. He placed Esther on the throne, allowed Mordecai to uncover a plot, disrupted the king’s sleep, and timed everything perfectly.

Now why not deliver Esther and Mordecai and the Jewish people without this hair-raising plot and the anguish of a murderous edict? Well, we don’t know all the reasons, but what we do know is that even to this day God doesn’t just deliver us *from* the problems of life; He develops us *through* the problems of life.

How often do you face problems in your life, and you automatically stop to thank Him for developing you to be more like Him?

This drama has changed Esther and Mordecai forever. They are not the same people; they are now openly taking a stand in their world with the people of God. In fact, His work is only beginning to show fruit in their lives. There is much more to come.

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Revisit Esther chapter 4, what two influences, noted above, did God use to prepare her to “hear” and accept His delay? How has the counsel of godly people and praying given you courage and wisdom to trust God’s will for your life?

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Tomasino, “Esther” in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, vol. 3, ed. John H. Walton (Zondervan, 2009), 496.

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