

CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 6

THE BOOK OF ESTHER

CHAPTER 6

INTRODUCTION

This chapter offers a classic case study of the providential hand of God over His people. The timing of God was perfect! There are no accidents in the believer's life. His ways are ordered by the LORD at every turn. There are no missteps for the obedient child of God. This was the case in Mordecai's life. He did not do anything throughout this chapter. God did it all for him. God even used Mordecai's worst enemy, Haman, to accomplish God's sovereign will.

We also study the sin of pride and its consequences in this chapter. God's Word plainly declares (Proverbs 16:18): *Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.* Haman has displayed that he was a proud and evil man. But thus far, he had been prospering. And the ordinary reader of the Word of God may be fretting and anxious to know when justice would be meted to the wicked. The LORD has promised that while the wicked may seek to slay the righteous, yet the LORD would not let the righteous be in the hands of the wicked (Psalm 37:32-33). However, when they are in the

hands of the wicked, it is of the LORD's doing and his children must not murmur or complain but remain steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord for as much as he knows his labour in the Lord is not in vain.

By the end of chapter 5, all hopes seemed lost. The Jews, who are God's chosen people, were under threat of being totally annihilated. At this juncture, there seemed to be no hope for them. Esther had bided her time in pleading for the lives of the Jews. She was very wise to wait for God's timing. Now chapter 6 occurred first, before her second feasting. Mordecai was in danger of being hanged if Haman managed to get the king's permission. Haman had a strong influence on the king.

Unless God intervened to save His people, everything seemed hopeless. Would God intervene to save His people? Would Esther plead for the Jews in her second banquet? Would the king come to the second banquet? Would Esther be successful? What and how would Esther present her petition? Was God still in control? These questions loom in the mind of the reader, who would expect to find the answers to these questions in chapter 6.

The following is a suggested outline:

1. The Kingly Insomnia (6:1-3);
2. Haughty Presumption (6:4-6);
3. Honourable Promotion (6:7-9);
4. No Laughing Matter (6:10-11);
5. Fall from Grace (6:12-13);

6. The Second Banquet (6:14).¹**COMMENTARY****The Kingly Insomnia – 6:1-3**

On that night refers to the night after the king had returned to his palace from Esther's 1st banquet. It was a crucial night and what happened would change the course of events that would eventually save the Jews and exalt Mordecai. The king could not sleep that night – literally, sleep fled away from him. No reason is given for his sleeplessness.² One reason why the king could not sleep was that he had too much to drink and eat at the banquet. Another reason was his attempt to think what Esther's petition could possibly be. Whatever the reason, we know that on that night, it was the LORD who took away sleep from the king's eyes. Something so innocuous could turn out to be the crucial turning point in God's great plan of salvation for Mordecai and the Jews.

The king asked for *the book of records of the chronicles* to be read to him. The king's choice for the records of his reign to be read to him

¹ A. Boyd Luter & Barry C. Davis suggest the following outline: (1) The record of the empire (1-3); (2) The request of the emperor (4-6); (3) The recklessness of the enemy (7-9); (4) The reward of the exemplar (10-11); (5) The remorse of the enemy (12-

² King Nebuchadnezzar could not sleep at a key moment because he was troubled by a dream which was sent by God to him (Daniel 2:1). King Darius could not sleep because he was troubled by Daniel's likely fate in the den of the lions (Daniel 6:18).

was most unusual to say the least. He had the choice of many activities for his sleeplessness. He could summon for music, dancing girls or even a bevy of girls from his enormous harem. Yet he chose to have the government records that chronicled his reign to be read to him! Such records were full of anecdotes that might relieve his sleeplessness and boredom, and information that might give instruction to the king. So, the records were brought and read aloud to him. The grammatical tense of the verb "to read" indicates that the reading went on for some length of time. Another seemingly innocuous activity that adds to the previous sleeplessness and the two added together changed the course of human history.

When the reading came to the part which chronicled the saving of the king's life by Mordecai, the king was awakened. It is interesting to note that there were many volumes of such records available. For the king's servant to pick this particular record from the shelf was indeed amazing. The king then asked his servants (v.3): *What honour and dignity hath been done for Mordecai for this?* The king's servants replied that nothing was done for him. At that moment, the king strangely asked (v.4): *Who is in the court?* Haman was in the courtyard. Clearly, he went there early in the morning to be the first to have an audience with the king. The reason was that he wanted to ask the king for permission to hang Mordecai. What an irony! The king was about to think how he could reward Mordecai

for thwarting an attempt on his life, and Haman was about to ask him for his approval to hang Mordecai. God had outwitted Haman at every turn of events. It appears that Haman was having the upper hand all this while with his money and powerful influence and audience with the king himself. Yet, in all his evil plotting and planning, Haman was fighting a losing battle. He was fighting against God. He can never win.

Haughty Presumption – 6:4-6

The king ordered his servants to let Haman enter into his room. Haman came in. The king asked him (v.6): *What should be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?* King Ahasuerus was so used to asking others, especially his servants, for their ideas and opinions. When Vashti defied his command to appear at his banquet, he asked his seven princes what should be done to Vashti (1:15). And when he missed Vashti, he did not know what to do, until one of his servants suggested that a better wife should be found to replace Vashti (2:3, 4). And now, in this instance, he asked Haman for his counsel.

What is so shockingly interesting is that Haman thought in his heart that he was the man whom the king delighted to honour. Instead of asking the king the name of the person whom the king wanted to honour, he presumed straightaway that he was the person. His pride and ego had dulled his mind, and his eyes could see no one beyond his nose. So, he happily plunged right in with his proposal. He began by restating

the king's words to him: *for the man whom the king delighteth to honour* (6:7). Then he continued and proposed the following things: that the royal robe which the king wore, and the horse which the king rode, and the royal crown which was placed on his head, be brought out (v.8). And these items should be delivered personally by hand by the king's most noble prince, for them to dress *the man whom the king delighteth to honour*. And then let the king's most noble prince lead him on horseback through the street of the city and loudly proclaiming before him: this shall it be done to *the man whom the king delighteth to honour* (v.9).

Observe that in his brief and rapid proposition, Haman repeated three times the words that the king spoke regarding the man whom he wanted to honour. The package Haman proposed to the king in fact exalted the man as equal to the king. For one thing, the parade was centred on one man, and even the king played no part at all. One can see that only Haman could conceive such an egotistical plan. His egocentric perspective was the hallmark of his character. Secretly, Haman dreamed of being the king. Was Haman laying the ground for a coup against the king? Given his fanaticism, this was plausible. Haman was not prepared for the rude shock that was about to befall him.

Honourable Promotion – 6:7-9

The king immediately said to Haman to *make haste* and honour *Mordecai the Jew that sitteth at the king's gate*. There was no room for

any mistaken identity. It was *the* Mordecai who sat at the king's gate and who refused to pay homage to him. The king even repeated the specific items, which Haman proposed, and told him to ensure that nothing was left out. The king specifically mentioned that it was Mordecai the Jew, and not any other Mordecai.

Somehow, the king knew that that Mordecai was a Jew because Esther had registered it in his name. This must have been a terrible blow to Haman. His great plan to destroy Mordecai was to destroy all Jews. His evil plan fell apart before his very eyes – from destruction to the highest promotion. These words of promotion came from the same lips that planned death and destruction the past weeks. From Haman's curses against the Jews, God used Haman to bless Mordecai.

No Laughing Matter – 6:10-11

It was a crushing blow to Haman. It was the king's command to honour one whom Haman considered as the most despicable man in the world, and his arch-enemy. Worse still, he was to lead Mordecai adorned with royal robe down the street of the city in full view of all the inhabitants of the city of Shushan. And what would the officials at the king's gate who had earlier reported to Haman about Mordecai's refusal to respect him think? Would they not laugh at the sight of Haman leading Mordecai and proclaiming that Mordecai was the man whom the king delighted to honour!

The king probably did not realize that he had struck three hard blows on Haman's face: Haman hated the name Mordecai, and identified him as the Jew, and his official position—*the one who sitteth at the king's gate*; Haman was told to do it without delay; and Haman could not refuse or disobey the king.

It must have been most humiliating for a man like Haman consumed by his own ego and pride to humble himself before all men to see.

Fall from Grace – 6:12-13

After the parade, Mordecai returned to sit at the king's gate as if nothing much had happened. The divine-inspired writer was silent on this note on how Mordecai reacted. On the other hand, Haman hurried back to his home, grief-stricken and *having his head covered*. Having his head covered shows that he was ashamed and devastated. When he returned home, Haman told his wife and all his friends every thing that had happened to him. Then his wise friends and his wife, Zeresh, said to him (v.13): *If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him*. These were the same folks who had played on his ego by suggesting to him to erect a gallows to hang Mordecai, and go and enjoy the banquet to be hosted by Esther who had earlier invited him together with the king to attend. They predicted that he would be doomed because Mordecai was a Jew.

Did they know something about the Jews and their God who had a hand in the exaltation of Mordecai? And whosoever would persecute God's people would be doomed to failure and destruction. As Gentiles, they would not know these theological truths. Instead of comforting Haman in his darkest hour, they left him hanging by himself. However, what they uttered was the truth. Indeed, it was already the beginning of the Haman's downfall. The tables were now turned against the wicked Haman. These words from his wife and friends drove another "nail" into the already grief-stricken and humiliated Haman.

The Second Banquet – 6:14

And while Haman, his wife Zeresh and his friends were still talking, the king's servants came to escort Haman hurriedly to the banquet which Esther had prepared. This was the second banquet. Haman had hardly caught his breath, and then was whisked away to the banquet. He was led like a sheep to the slaughter. That morning he thought that the early bird would certainly catch the worm; but alas the worm gotten him instead. Now present at the banquet would be Esther, the king and Haman. At this second banquet, Esther had promised the king that she would definitely present her petition to the king.

PRACTICAL VALUE

The divine writer wants us to know that the events in this chapter

were particularly the result of God's providence working to save His people. Since the day Esther decided to approach the king to plead for the Jews, things had not improved although the Jews had prayed for three days and nights. Things continued to get worse for God's people. The edict to destroy them cannot be repealed or changed. This was the law of the Persians. All seems lost and hopeless for the Jews and Mordecai. At the beginning of chapter 6, Mordecai's life was hanging on a string. And so, we witness man's extremity is God's opportunity.

Events in chapter 6 took a sudden dramatic turn that changed the course of history: the sleeplessness of the king; the discovery of Mordecai's good deed in saving the king's life; the intention of the king to honour Mordecai; the timing of Haman's appearance before the king; the king's request to Haman on how to honour Mordecai; the humiliation of Haman; the prediction by Haman's wife and friends; and whisking away of Haman to Esther's second banquet when Esther would present her petition to the king as promised. All these events did not happen by chance nor can they be explained as mere coincidence.

The only reasonable explanation is that they were the providential work of God to save His people. God had made a covenant with His people, and He would not let anyone thwart His plan and purpose. This is a great comfort to all believers who belong to God. Our grief and

suffering are temporary, and we can be assured that one day they will be removed by the wonder-working of God in our lives. We need not fear that anything untoward will happen to us without the knowledge and permission of God. And if such bad things should happen to us, we know that they are for our good. Even when these sufferings end in death, to the believer, it is also victory because he is absent from his body but present with the Lord. God did not guarantee deliverance from physical hurt and death for all believers. However, He did promise us that He will never leave us or forsake us. He will never leave us comfortless. He will be with us even unto the end of the world!

While we recognize the providence of God working on behalf of His people, we also see another truth related to it. It is that God providentially works even through the day-to-day circumstances of life. He works through such human phenomenon as insomnia, the reading of specific text of a specific book, the anger of a man, the timing of events and even the words of unbelievers, and the actions of people doing their jobs. We learn that nothing in life is too insignificant for God to use it for the good of His people and the downfall of their enemies.

One glaring truth concerning pride is aptly illustrated in this chapter. In the book of Proverbs, it is stated: *Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall* (16:18), and another, *A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall*

uphold the humble in spirit (Proverbs 29:23). Haman was full of pride. He could think of no man better and greater than himself and who deserved all the best in life at the exclusion of others. And what God has declared in His Word concerning man who indulges in the sin of pride that he will fall and be brought down. God will not be mocked; what He has said will happen. This is a warning to the people of the world who rebel and reject Him. Ultimately, every one will have to bow and be brought down before Him. Hence, bow now and be lifted up by Him, or bow later and be thrown into the Lake of Fire.

Another valuable practical lesson that we can learn is to choose our friends carefully. Haman was surrounded by so-called wise friends. When he was rich and powerful, his friends advised and supported him. Knowing his ego, they advised him to erect a gallows and hang Mordecai on it. And with his enemy removed, he could enjoy his special dinner with the king at Esther's banquet. This suggestion pleased Haman. But when he was emotionally devastated and humiliated after being ordered to honour Mordecai the Jew publicly, his same friends, instead of comforting him, they expressed words of doom upon him, and left him to stand alone. Beware whom we choose to be our friends. A friend in need is a friend in deed. Difficult situations in life often reveal our true character traits. Many people surrounded our Lord Jesus Christ wherever He went and healed the people; and they even welcomed Him on His triumphant entry into

Jerusalem. But when He was falsely accused, arrested and tortured, they shouted for His death by crucifixion. We should be discerning. Choose faithful friends who are able to comfort in practical ways, and counsel you with the Word of God. AMEN

2. How did King Ahasuerus respond when he discovered that Mordecai the Jew had saved his life from an attempted assassination plot against him (6:2 -6)? What is your understanding of the perfect timing of his sleeplessness and reading of the chronicles?

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Esther 6:1-9; Proverbs 21:1-5.

TUESDAY: Esther 6:1-11; Luke 14:11.

WEDNESDAY: Esther 6:1-14; Proverbs 29:23.

THURSDAY: Esther 6:1-14; Galatians 6:7-8.

FRIDAY: Esther 1-14.

3. What irony do you see in the actions of King Ahasuerus and Haman on this particular night (5:14; 6:1-6)?

Discussion Questions

1. Are there insignificant events in a believer’s life? What do you do when you cannot sleep at night? (cf. 6:1)

4. Haman assumed that he was “the man whom the king delighted to honour.” What do you think were his reasons (6:6-7)? Do you think this way about yourself too, especially when the CEO says that they will be promoting diligent employees and automatically you think of yourself?

been proposed to honour Mordecai, and why (6:9-10)?

5. What are the things that Haman proposed to the king to honour the man whom the king delighted to reward (6:8-9)? Do you long for these things too?

8. How would you describe Haman's internal state when he realized that Mordecai was the man whom the king delighted to honour?

6. What else can we discern about Haman's character through his proposition to the king to honour the man whom the king delighted to reward (6:7-9)?

9. Do you think that the king knew about the feud between Haman and Mordecai?

7. Whom did the king assign to immediately carry out what had

10. What else can we discern about Haman's character through his proposition to the king to honour the man whom the king delighted to reward (6:7-9)? The king referred to Mordecai as "the Jew"; how did the king know that (6:10)?

11. How did Mordecai react to the honour accorded to him?

12. How did Zeresh and Haman's friends interpret the humiliating experience that happened to Haman (6:13)?

13. In your opinion, what is the most crucial happening in this chapter? Why?

14. What particular character trait does this chapter warn us against?

15. What have you learned about God in this chapter?
