

ESTHER

For Such A Time As This

by

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CHAPTER SIX

THE RISE AND FALL OF MEN

THE READER OF HISTORY cannot fail to notice that history is made up largely of the rise and fall of nations as well as of the rise and fall of individuals. The historical books of the Bible give many illustrations of this fact. But they do more, they also give us the moral reason for this. The Bible tells us that **“God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another”** (Psalm 75:7). The great King Nebuchadnezzar had to learn that by bitter experience. Even though he was declared to be that **“head of gold”** (Daniel 2:38), the first and greatest of a long line of emperors, he had to learn that it was the God of Heaven who had given him **“a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory.”**

As a matter of fact, he learned even more than that through the humbling experience of having to live in the open fields like a beast for seven years. It was at the end of those days that he lifted up his eyes to Heaven, and his understanding returned unto him, and then he blessed the Most High, and praised and honored Him who lives forever, who not only rules among men on the earth, but who also **“doeth according to his will in the army of heaven . . . and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?”** (Daniel 4:34, 35).

The chapter now before us gives us another striking illustration of this. In our study of chapter 3 we saw the promotion, or advancement, of Haman. We also saw that instead of using that advancement for the good and blessing of others, he became proud and haughty. How truly does the Bible say, **“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall”** (Proverbs 16:18)! And **“when pride cometh, then cometh shame”** (Proverbs 11:2). Our present chapter gives abundant proof of the truth of these statements. On the other hand, our chapter also gives us a good illustration of the text which says, **“Them that honor me I will honor”** (I Samuel 2:30).

The manner in which God moves to bring these things to pass is full of interest. We may have wondered why Esther was so slow in presenting her real request to the king when she had the opportunity to do so. We have suggested that that was quite in keeping with the manner of the Orient. But there is more to it than that. The hand of the Lord was in that apparent delay. It was all part of His divine plan to humble the proud and arrogant Haman.

Of course, He might have used some other method. He could have smitten Haman with some fatal illness, or He might have brought upon him some other adversity. But if He had, then some might have explained his downfall as nothing more or less than an unhappy circumstance, something which might have happened to anyone else.

The action begins in the bedchamber of the king himself. **“On that night could not the king sleep.”** Nothing is said about the cause of his insomnia. It is written, **“The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep”** (Ecclesiastes 5:12). Now if this Ahasuerus was the wealthy Xerxes of secular history, it is quite possible that the abundance of his riches did not permit him to sleep. How different was the case of the Psalmist who said, **“I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob”** (Psalm 132:4, 5)¹ We may be sure that it was no such glorious purpose as this that kept Ahasuerus awake that night. He who neither slumbers nor sleeps (Psalm 121:3, 4), the ever watchful Keeper of Israel, was present in the royal bedchamber that night. The king’s heart is in His hand to turn it whithersoever He wills (Proverbs 21:1). In the case of Nebuchadnezzar, He used dreams **“wherewith his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him”** (Daniel 2:1). And in the case of Darius whose **“sleep went from him”** (Daniel 6:18), we see again the hand of that same One who ever keepeth watch above His own.

Presumably sedatives were not unknown in those days. But Ahasuerus did not order one. He called in no physician to prescribe for him, nor a minstrel to play for him. **“He commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king.”**

“It has been a custom with Eastern kings, in all ages, frequently to cause the annals of the kingdom to be read to them. It is resorted to, not merely to while away the tedium of an hour, but a source of instruction to the monarch, by reviewing the important incidents of his own life, as well as those of his ancestors” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*). **“And it was found written, that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king’s chamberlains, the keepers of the door, who sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus.”** We know from our study of chapter 2 that Ahasuerus knew all about this at the time it happened. But for some reason or other he did nothing to reward Mordecai then. And yet, in a sense, Ahasuerus owed his very life to Mordecai. In that sense he was his savior, even though he was not recognized as such.

How true it is that there are many today who have been saved from something worse than Ahasuerus was saved from, but they seem to know little or nothing about their Saviour!

Apparently they just take Him for granted. They seem to be quite satisfied with what He has done for them. They may even sing about it at times. But they forget that, according to the Bible, salvation is something more than a great work which has been wrought for us. When the aged Simeon gazed into the face of the Babe Jesus he said to God, **“Mine eyes have seen thy salvation”** (Luke 2:30). Apparently, to him at least, salvation was more than something, it was Someone.

The rediscovery of Mordecai by Ahasuerus may well serve to teach all of us who claim to be saved how important it is to get better acquainted with the One who has saved us.

He has not only saved us from the eternal consequences of our sins, but He saves us moment by moment as we walk through a world that is filled with perils and dangers, seen and unseen. Oh, that there were more searching of **“the book of the records”** so that we might become increasingly aware of this and, like Ahasuerus, do something about it! It was a night well spent to look up some of these things. Then it would not have to be said of our blessed Lord, as I fear that it must be said so far as some of us are concerned, **“There is nothing done for him.”** Just as Ahasuerus inquired, **“What honor and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this?”** so also may we inquire concerning our Lord Jesus, **“What honor and dignity have I brought to Him who has done so much for me?”** God forbid that it should ever have to be said of any of us that we have done nothing for Him!

At this point it is interesting to observe that just as the king was preparing to honor Mordecai, the enemy of Mordecai arrived on the scene. Such a coincidence is striking, but it is not unique. We need not suppose, of course, that Haman was aware of what was going on. But the one of whom he is a type is very wise. Satan will always seek to prevent, if possible, the honoring of any of God’s saints. And he will certainly do all in his power also to keep you and me from bringing honor to the name of the Lord Jesus. It is in view of this that Haman’s arrival at the court of Ahasuerus at this time is very significant. He probably had passed a sleepless night also. His workmen must have been busy most of the night preparing the gallows on which he hoped to hang Mordecai the next day. All he needed now was the royal permission to carry out his nefarious plan. He was “all set,” as men would say today.

It seems that Haman must have made known his presence in some way or another. In any case, the king seems to be aware that someone is in the court and accordingly he asks, **“Who is in the court?”** **“And the king’s servants said unto him, Behold, Haman standeth in the court. And the king said, Let him come in.”** Apparently, Haman did not have to go through the formality of waiting for the extended scepter as did Queen Esther. At least, nothing is said about that here. On the other hand, neither did the king give him a chance to present his request to him. The king did not treat him as a suppliant but as an adviser. And so, without even waiting to say, “Good morning,” he says to Haman, **“What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor?”**

We note that the king did not explain to Haman why he was asking him this question. He gave no hint of “the man” whom he had in mind. And Haman was so self-occupied that he did not inquire who it might be.

With utter selfishness he **“thought in his heart, To whom would the king delight to do honor more than to myself?”**

His pride robbed him of ordinary prudence, as it so often does. And so, once again we see the hand of the Lord who **“taketh the wise in their own craftiness”** (Job 5:13 and I Corinthians 3:19). Thus the question put to Haman by the king only served to bring out more than ever the selfishness that was in his heart. It is very clear that he knew nothing at all of that spirit manifested by the Apostle Paul who esteemed others better than himself (Philippians 2:3). His pride and his selfishness were his undoing.

In his ready reply to the king he shows no reserve whatsoever. He covets the habiliments of royalty itself. **“For the man whom the king delighteth to honor”** he would have them bring forth not only royal apparel, but **“the royal apparel which the king useth to wear.”** Neither did he want a horse like the king’s horse but the very **“horse that the king rideth upon.”** And then to cap it all, he suggests **“the crown royal which is set upon his head.”** Moreover, these things were to **“be delivered to the hand of one of the king’s most noble princes.”** No ordinary chamberlain, or valet, would be good enough to **“array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honor.”**

Then, to complete the picture, they were to bring “the man” on horseback through the street of the city with a herald proclaiming before him, **“Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honor.”** Little did Haman dream that such was not to be his honor. Blinded by pride, he could see no one but himself in that place of honor. On the other hand, we suspect that the king must have known all the while that Haman was really speaking for himself in this matter. If that were the case, then we can see that there must have been a bit of humor in all of this, sad as it is otherwise.

In his reply to Haman we note that the king said nothing about the crown royal. If he had granted that, we can see that it might have been assumed by some that Ahasuerus had actually transferred his royal authority and dignity to another. Indeed, it is entirely possible that Haman himself would have assumed that. One as selfish as he would have stopped at nothing short of the throne itself.

What follows here is most dramatic. **“Then the king said to Haman, Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king’s gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken.”**

We wonder whether Haman displayed any emotion when he heard that statement. Nothing is said about that here. But knowing something of the real purpose for which he had come to the palace that morning, one wonders how he could control himself so well at this time. Whatever his feelings were, he did not debate the matter with the king. He did not even beg to be excused. We may be sure that he would have done so had he dared.

“Then took Haman the apparel and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and brought him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor.”

He had repeated those last words so often in the presence of the king that by this time he must have been able to repeat them quite readily. According to the commandment of the king, he was to let nothing fail of all that he had spoken. He dared not disobey even though to obey meant that he had to eat his own words, as it were.

But what about Mordecai? So far as the record goes, he received all of this in silence. No doubt he, too, must have been somewhat surprised at the turn which events had taken, quite as much as Haman was. But then, we remember that he had said to Esther that deliverance would arise.

And in that which Haman was ordered to do to him he probably saw the beginning of the fulfillment of that prediction of his. And in all of this we may see a foreshadowing of what Satan himself will yet have to do when he is made to bow the knee before our Lord Jesus. And not only that, the Lord has promised His own that He will make them of the synagogue of Satan come and worship before their feet, and to make them know that He has loved His own (Revelation 3:9).

The patience and faithfulness of Mordecai was abundantly rewarded. What if he had weakened before that and had yielded to Haman? Think of what he would have lost! And in saying that, we are not thinking only of the temporal honor bestowed upon Mordecai. In a much higher sense the Lord was honoring one who had honored Him.

And the very fact that he received all of this in silence is very significant. He had nothing to boast of in himself. His behavior would seem to indicate that he recognized that. His conduct all through was certainly exemplary. He did not allow these things to puff him up with pride. And we do well to follow his example.

Haman's promotion, as we have seen, "went to his head," as the saying goes. Such was not the case with Mordecai. He would have been a fool indeed if he had not profited by the very thing which he saw to be the ruin of his enemy. And so, with becoming grace and modesty, he carried his honors well. And when the procession was all over "**Mordecai came again to the king's gate.**" Apparently, he resumed his former position as if he had been used merely as an illustration of one "**whom the king delighteth to honor.**"

"But Haman hastened to his house mourning, and having his head covered." The head covering he used was probably a veil which was a mark of mourning in those days. For example, we read in Jeremiah 14:3 that the nobles of Judah sent "**their little ones to the waters: they came to the pits, and found no water; they returned with their vessels empty; they were ashamed and confounded, and covered their heads.**" In like manner David, fleeing from Jerusalem because of his son Absalom, "**wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot**" (II Samuel 15:30). All of those who fled with him did the same.

From these references we gather that it was the usual mark of mourning in those days in that part of the world. And it would be a sign to the family of Haman that something dreadful had happened to the head of that household.

"And Haman told Zeresh his wife and all his friends every thing that had befallen him."

It was a great contrast to what he had hoped to be able to tell them on his return from his visit to the palace. When he left them not many hours before, he was told by his wife to go merrily with the king to the banquet. That banquet was evidently postponed for a while in order to allow time for Haman to carry out the command of the king. It seems reasonable to suppose that an event such as we have been considering would be known to everyone in the palace. Esther must have heard about it. Perhaps she and her ladies saw the whole procession. And the same may be said for the family of Haman unless his house was too far away from the royal palace for them to be fully aware of all that had happened there that morning.

According to the plan outlined by Zeresh, the wife of Haman, he was to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai and then to go merrily to the banquet arranged by Queen Esther. But as, in great detail, he reviewed all that had taken place that morning, it would be quite evident to all of them that things did not augur well for him.

“Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him, If Mordecai be the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him.”

We are not told on what they based this statement. Since they must have known all along that Mordecai was a Jew, it does seem strange that they did not say anything about this before. This shows that people may be aware of certain things and yet not be affected by them until something unusual takes place. Then, all of a sudden their whole attitude changes.

The same ones who were quite ready to urge the hanging of Mordecai, as if that were a very simple matter, now take the position that he is invincible. They do not even try to encourage Haman to believe that matters might turn out better than he had anticipated. They prophesied nothing but gloom. Haman had begun to fall, and nothing could now prevent his complete undoing. Such talk is characteristic of Satan and his agents. To begin with, they are ready with advice which promises complete success. But when their poor dupes discover that things have taken a turn against them, they have no message of hope and comfort, but only one of gloom and despair.

It may be that these lines are being read by one to whom Satan has promised much. Perhaps you have begun to realize already that you are doomed to disappointment. He did the same with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. He promised them that if they ate the forbidden fruit, they would be as gods. But when they found themselves face to face with Him, whose one single commandment they had disobeyed when they listened to the voice of the tempter, the latter had not one word of comfort or counsel for them. We are not suggesting that if he had said anything like that, that it would have been any good. He is always a liar. It is only in the “good news” of the Gospel that we hear words of hope and salvation such as every poor, lost sinner needs. But Haman’s friends had no such words for him.

“And while they were yet talking with him, came the king’s chamberlains, and hastened to bring Haman unto the banquet that Esther had prepared.”

That was to be his last banquet. If he had waited for the chamberlains to bring him the day before, the whole story might have been different. But in the meantime the Lord had been working out His plans and His purposes. And as we have said before, Satan may be wise but he is not omniscient. Had he known the way things would turn out, he might have advised his poor slave quite differently.

But Haman had begun to fall, not only before Mordecai, but before the Lord who **“is known by the judgment which he executeth; the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands”** (Psalm 9:16).

It is **“a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”** (Hebrews 10:31). And the story of Haman’s downfall should be a warning and a lesson to all who imagine that they can defeat Him. On the other hand, we may also take comfort from the study of this chapter when we take into account the wonderful way in which the Lord vindicates His own who trust in Him even though their faith may be weak and faltering. It may be, as in the case of Mordecai, that their faith may not even be articulate. But He is the God who hears the groaning which cannot be uttered. And He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask (audibly), or think (inaudibly).

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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