

Injustice Will Be Punished

Bible Background • ESTHER 3; 5; 7

Printed Text • ESTHER 7:1–10 | Devotional Reading • LUKE 19:11–26

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **EXPLICATE** the story of Esther as a triumph of justice, **SENSE** that treachery and wickedness will not win, and **CHOOSE** to act justly in every situation with the assurance that good triumphs over evil.

In Focus

In church, James and Mariah were leading the adult class discussion on why fighting injustice takes a willingness to take a stand even when you are afraid. After this discussion, Mariah spoke about God’s love for justice. Then, she reviewed Esther’s heroic deeds and James shared how Esther was a reluctant hero but eventually changed her mind to stand up for her people. He added how Mordecai’s instruction to his cousin daughter, Esther, and his determination for justice provided the catalyst to help save the Jewish people. They reminded the class that Mordecai and Esther literally changed the course of history.

Then, they asked the class to identify historical figures that represented risk takers and freedom fighters. Class members named persons like Fannie Lou Hamer, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Fredrick Douglass. Next, they asked the class to reflect on the sentence on the board, “When you look over your life, how many instances can you recall that you stood up for justice, especially when it was in a very stressful situation?” The class gave different responses about marches they had organized or participated in.” After this discussion, James and Mariah asked the class to find three Scriptures during the week which encourage them to stand up for justice.

How do you stand up for God’s justice? Identify when you did not stand up for justice.

Keep in Mind

“So they impaled Haman on the pole he had set up for Mordecai, and the king’s anger subsided” (Esther 7:10, NLT).

Words You Should Know

A. Afraid (v. 6) ba’at (Heb.)—To be terrified, overwhelmed, troubled

B. Gallows (v. 10) ‘ets (Heb.)—Tree, branch, spike

Say It Correctly

Xerxes. ZURK-sees.

Ahasuerus. uh-HAZ-er-us.

Harbonah. har-BONE-ah.

KJV

1 Esther 7:1 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.

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.

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.

NLT

1 Esther 7:1 So the king and Haman went to Queen Esther's banquet.

2 On this second occasion, while they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, "Tell me what you want, Queen Esther. What is your request? I will give it to you, even if it is half the kingdom!"

3 Queen Esther replied, "If I have found favor with the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my request, I ask that my life and the lives of my people will be spared.

4 For my people and I have been sold to those who would kill, slaughter, and annihilate us. If we had merely been sold as slaves, I could remain quiet, for that would be too trivial a matter to warrant disturbing the king."

5 "Who would do such a thing?" King Xerxes demanded. "Who would be so presumptuous as to touch you?"

6 Esther replied, "This wicked Haman is our adversary and our enemy." Haman grew pale with fright before the king and queen.

7 Then the king jumped to his feet in a rage and went out into the palace garden. Haman, however, stayed behind to plead for his life with Queen Esther, for he knew that the king intended to kill him.

8 In despair he fell on the couch where Queen Esther was reclining, just as the king was returning from the palace garden. The king exclaimed, "Will he even assault the queen right here in the palace, before my very eyes?" And as soon as the king spoke, his attendants covered Haman's face, signaling his doom.

9 Then Harbona, one of the king's eunuchs, said, "Haman has set up a sharpened pole that stands seventy-five feet tall in his own courtyard. He intended to use it to impale Mordecai, the man who saved the king from assassination." "Then impale Haman on it!" the king ordered.

10 So they impaled Haman on the pole he had set up for Mordecai, and the king's anger subsided.

The People, Places, and Times

The Book of Esther. In the Jewish community, the Book of Esther is read every year during the festival of Purim, which commemorates this story. Internally, the Book of Esther does not mention God's name in any of its ten chapters. God is not seen or heard to offer direct guidance to anyone. When Esther calls for a period of

fasting, no direct reference to prayer is made (Esther 4:15ff). Even though it was canonized with the rest of Scripture during the middle of the first millennium AD, the first Christian commentary on the book of Esther did not appear until the ninth century. Consequently, some in the Christian community have critically questioned the book of Esther's use for revealing the nature of God. These concerns, however, have not dampened the book's capacity to encourage Christian believers to defend what is morally right.

Background

Here in this passage, we find Esther making her plea and request to King Xerxes, also called Ahasuerus. The story of Esther began in 483 BC, which was 103 years after Nebuchadnezzar took the Jewish people into captivity. Mordecai's family went into exile from Jerusalem because of Nebuchadnezzar. Even after King Cyrus allowed them to return, many Jews stayed and lived in Persia because they experienced great freedom. Xerxes was the fifth king of Persia (the kingdom that overthrew and ruled much the same territory as Babylonia) and during that time was considered a dominant force to be reckoned with both in wealth and influence. At the beginning of Esther's story, Vashti was Xerxes' queen, and because of her perceived disobedience to the king, she was banished. Xerxes sought to look for a new queen who was both young and a virgin. Esther's family had chosen to stay in Persia and as such, Esther was considered for queen and ultimately given the title because of her beauty and charm. As the queen, Esther kept her background as a Jew a secret. She was given very few rights as a queen, and because of the behavior of Vashti in particular, there was a weariness to relinquish any rights to her. However, she would ultimately be the one to save Mordecai from death because he refused to bow down or kneel to Haman, the highest official in the king's court. Haman's ancestors, the Amalekites, were a long-time ancient enemy of the Jews, and they were warned to "blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven" (Deuteronomy 25:19; cf. Exodus 17:14; 1 Samuel 15:3). Although Jews did show honor and reverence to government officials, Mordecai could not extend that same honor to Haman. As a result, Haman plotted to kill Mordecai and all the Jews, which is why Esther found herself pleading with King Xerxes to reverse the decree to kill all the Jews.

How might Esther have felt bearing the weight of saving the lives of herself, family, and people?

At-A-Glance

1. Esther's Petition (Esther 7:1–6)
2. Haman's Demise (vv. 7–10)

In Depth

1. Esther's Petition (Esther 7:1–6)

Esther hosted two banquets and invited the King to bring Haman to each, Esther 7 records the events of the second banquet and Esther's hopes of pleading with the king to save the lives of her people and Mordecai. But it was not an easy task. Esther understood that she had minimal rights as a queen. The text does not mention the name of God; however, it assumes that in her fasting it was God who had covered her as she prepared herself to ask the king her request. Esther was going up against not only the power of the king's decree but also Haman, the most powerful noble in the land. Haman had a direct hatred against the Jews. Unfortunately, when he entered the banquet of the queen, he was unaware of her identity as a Jewish woman. The king had already proclaimed that he was both willing to hear and approve her requests, which is evidence that God had honored the prayers and fasting to provide her with favor from the king even before she made her requests known. The king boldly states, "What is your petition? It will be given to you." Esther requests that the King save her people from annihilation and makes the case that if her people were sold into slavery that she would have kept quiet. She emphasizes this is not because the Jewish people have offended the government but because the hatred and prejudice of one man is the potential cause of their destruction.

What strategy did Esther formulate in her approach to the king, and how was that important in her achieving her outcome to save her people?

2. Haman's Demise (vv. 7–10)

Once the king realizes what Haman had done, he becomes outraged. The king in his anger walks to the garden to cool off and comes to the realization that Haman fooled him. Haman is afraid as what was at one point a banquet of joy quickly turned into terror as he realized that he was in the line of judgment. Haman, a once proud noble, finds himself at the foot of the woman he wished to destroy; the roles were now reversed. God's rule declares that those who choose to persecute God's chosen ones will ultimately become beholden to them. As Haman pleads for his life, the king enters, more enraged, and the King's servants quickly covered Haman's face. It was practice to cover the face of the one who was condemned to death because the Persian kings refused to look at them. The king then orders that the pole Haman had built to be the demise of Mordecai should become the measure by which his own life is taken. Haman's prejudice and hatred are what led to his destruction. Mordecai is now given the position of honor, and Haman the execution.

Search the Scriptures

1. What is Esther's answer when the king tells her to make her request (Esther 7:3)?
2. How does Esther describe the plot against Mordecai and the Jews (v. 4)?
3. Where does the idea of the method of Haman's death come from? Why is it important?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Why was it essential for Esther to prepare the king's heart through fasting for her petition?
2. Does it seem just that Haman was put to death with the same pole that he had initially designed to kill Mordecai on? Why or why not?
3. Have you ever found yourself in Esther's position, having to speak for the dignity of a person or group of people that you witnessed being wrongfully persecuted by those in authority?

Liberating Lesson

In our world today many people find themselves persecuted, marginalized, and oppressed because of their race, immigration status, and position in society. We are desperately in need of individuals who will stand up to modern-day Hamans who wish to destroy the well-being of others. If we look closely at our elected officials, we note that those who come from marginalized communities have had to fight to get a seat at the table. When they finally get to the table, they feel a responsibility to speak and advocate on behalf of their respective communities. Unfortunately, there are systems and individuals that wish to tarnish our democratic process by doing everything in their power to stop change from coming to fruition. Nevertheless, the efforts, spirit, heart, and conviction of those who seek liberation and hope are able to call attention to the social ills in this country. It is our job as a community to continue uplifting voices who speak out against unjust practices, to keep them in our prayers, and when called upon, to also use our privilege and voice to uplift the silenced voices in our world.

Application for Activation

As you find yourself witnessing the continued marginalization of individuals in this country, seek out and support organizations using their platform to elevate and alleviate the plight of the marginalized. Secondly, continue praying for and voting for elected officials who will attempt not to harm and oppress the least of these but will establish and fight for policies that will make their lives better. Lastly, through prayer and fasting, bring all your cares and worries regarding how people are treated to God and trust that God will bring forth justice and righteousness.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Esther 7:1–10

1. 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.

The narrative of Queen Esther has been building up to this point. Esther is very beautiful and was chosen by the king from a number of candidates to be the queen of Persia. Haman, one of the king's officials, was an Agagite, a tribe that had warred with Israel from the days of Joshua (Exodus 17, 1 Samuel 15, 1 Samuel 30). It was on the basis of this generational hatred that Mordecai, Esther's uncle, refused to bow before Haman. In retaliation, Haman decided to punish all Jews. To this end, he tricked the king into signing a decree to search for and kill the entire population of Jews in the empire. Mordecai informed Esther of Haman's plot and encouraged her to use her position to help the Jews who were scattered throughout the Persian Empire. Esther gains the attention of the king and invites him and Haman to a banquet where she makes her request. In the revelry of the second banquet, the king asks Esther to make her request known and obligates himself to fulfill her desire.

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.

Queen Esther is very clever. The king loves her, is very proud of her, and is taken with her beauty. She wisely sets up the situation to liberate her people by seizing the opportunity to ask the king to spare her life and the lives of her Jewish people. She informs him that she herself and the Jewish people have been sold out to be killed. She follows up that by saying that if they had simply been sold as slaves, it would not even be worth mentioning to someone as important as the king. She says the "enemy" (Heb. tsar, TSAR, trouble, distress) would not have been severe enough to damage the king's time and energy. "Enemy" here probably refers to the situation rather than Haman himself. Esther's wording simultaneously flatters the king and expresses the direness of her situation. She appeals to his ego, his relationship with her, and his sense of reason all at the same time.

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.

King Xerxes (Ahasuerus, KJV), the king of Persia, is deeply troubled at this news. How dare someone try to kill his beautiful queen? How dare someone decide who should die in his kingdom without him knowing? He wants to know who had the boldness to do such a thing. Esther does not hesitate to tell the king the truth. It was Haman who had been plotting to destroy the Jews in Persia, and she calls out his wickedness and injustice plainly. Haman cannot help but be afraid (Heb. ba'at, bah-AT). This is not the usual word for being afraid but is mostly reserved for poetic expressions. The heightened diction shows the extent of Haman's fear. He had just been bragging to his friends and family about being invited to this exclusive banquet, and now the banquet has turned into a trap. He has been exposed for trying to wield the power of life and death, a power reserved only for the king in his kingdom. He has been called out for his injustice to his face, in front of the one person in the kingdom that could do something to punish him.

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.

The king was furious. He walked out of the party and went into the garden, presumably to calm himself down. While he was outside, Haman got up and went to plead for his life from Queen Esther as she reclined on her "bed" (Heb. mittah, meet-TAH). The word sometimes refers to a bed for sleeping, but here refers to a dining couch (cf. Ezekiel 23:41). He had put himself in this situation with his own wickedness toward Esther; now Esther was the only one who could save him. The king was clearly angry and willing to kill him for his arrogance and injustice. He was placed at the mercy of the woman he had made his enemy. But when the king came back in from trying to cool his head before he made a rash decision, his anger was reignited. Again the comedic irony comes to play as the king misinterprets the situation. He saw Haman falling on the couch where Queen Esther was eating and believed he was trying to sexually assault her. In reality, he was pleading for his own life; he had gone from aggressor to beggar in reality and was being mistaken as going from subservient to subversive. As soon as the king finishes speaking, Haman's face is covered by the palace guards to take him, prisoner.

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.

Here is the ultimate irony. Haman had already built the dreaded device to kill and display Mordecai and ends up being killed on it himself. Although the KJV translates "gallows," the more likely translation is NLT's "sharpened pole." The Hebrew here ('ets, ETS) literally means tree, and so only implies that the structure is made of wood. The king's command to kill Haman is to "hang" (Heb. talah, tah-LAH) him on the instrument. To the modern Western mind, an execution by "hanging" on a "tree" would clearly speak of being hanged by a noose on a gallows. However, this sort of execution was rare in Persia at the time. Also, this same wording is used for the baker whose dream Joseph interprets in jail, who was beheaded before being "hanged" on a "tree" (Genesis 40:19), making the use of a noose impossible. Impaling one's enemies as execution or displaying their bodies after death was more common at that time and therefore the more likely translation.

Haman had been plotting genocide against the Jews as an incredible act of evil and injustice because of Mordecai's refusal to bow before him. He wanted to make an example of Mordecai, not only to have him killed but to let the whole kingdom know he was killed. Now that Haman's evil plot was exposed, the very pole he was going to use to impale Mordecai would be used to impale him. Justice was fully exacted in kind for the injustice that Haman intended upon the innocent man and his people. This reminds us that those who prepare traps for others may fall in themselves (Psalm 5:9–10).

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Mordecai Refuses to Bow to Haman
(Esther 3:1–6)

TUESDAY

Haman Sets Decree to Destroy the Jews
(Esther 3:7–11)

WEDNESDAY

Haman Builds Gallows to Hang Mordecai
(Esther 5:9–14)

THURSDAY

Decree against Jews Struck Down
(Esther 8:3–8, 16–17)

FRIDAY

Festival of Purim Established
(Esther 9:18–23, 29–32)

SATURDAY

Mordecai Advances Welfare of the Jews
(Esther 10:1–3)

SUNDAY

Esther's Plea and Haman's Punishment
(Esther 7:1–10)