

Esther's gambit

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[0 : 00] Supreme in wisdom as in power the rock of ages stands though him you cannot see nor trace the working of his hands.! That you are the one who reigns and the one who has the concerns of his people in his hand.

In the name of Jesus. Amen. Amen. Amen. So Mordecai had said to Esther perhaps you've come to royal position for such a time as this.

And it's not going to take long for Mordecai's words to be proved true. Haman's plans to destroy the Jews is gathering place.

And in chapter 4 we read how Esther was originally unaware of this scheme but was alerted to it by Mordecai. And apparently just in the space of one day Esther moves from merely being Mordecai's protegee to taking responsibility herself for her people.

Notice at the beginning of chapter 5 there's a three day pause. That was the three days of the fast that Esther had suggested that all the people should hold.

[1 : 44] And then after those three days Esther takes action. Wine, women and parties are what Xerxes is interested in.

And Esther knows her king and knows that's what she'll provide. And events move at a tremendous pace. There's words like hurry and quickly and as soon as.

All the way through this passage they take the speed. And as I say it seems that the whole crisis lasts only a couple of days. But in these two days quite momentous events take place.

So I'd like to pull the text apart a little bit as it were. Go through it in a bit more detail. This is not I hope so that we can sort of make an academic judgment over it.

Not even really so that we can get a grasp of the text. So much as to help the text get a grasp on us. That we might see how this cleverly constructed story.

[2 : 53] And it is cleverly constructed. Put together by a master narrator. A master storyteller. How it is meant to lead us to answer the question.

Who is the unnamed God? And what does he do for his people? So this key section divides really into five parts.

First part in chapter 5 verses 1 to 8. Which I've titled there Esther Puts on Royalty. And then we read what happens when Haman goes home.

And then we mean meanwhile what's happening back at the palace. And then Haman goes home again. And then we get to Esther's second banquet.

And the end game. That's what we might call it. Do notice the structure there. It is one of these Hebrew sandwiches that we often find in Hebrew literature.

[3 : 56] Chiasm is the technical term. And normally at the centre of this sandwich. You find some important spiritually uplifting passage.

What we find at the centre of this sandwich in Esther. Is political farce frankly. It's a kind of Persian yes minister isn't it?

It has all the hallmarks of farce. Weird coincidences. People who don't have quite the vital piece of information that they need.

And therefore may end up making the wrong decision. And it all happens at a tremendous pace. So nobody really has time to think. People are sort of world round. In the events.

As they take place. So we should think that perhaps. This central part. Is perhaps the most important part. But a lot of this of course is about Esther herself.

[4 : 57] Although she's noticeably absent. From this central section. So we'll go through the text. A bit at a time. And then at the end. I'll try and draw our thoughts together. With some reflections on the text.

Text. So first of all. Esther. She has been reminded. By Mordecai. That she is after all the queen. And perhaps you better start. Taking that responsibility seriously. And so. In chapter 5 verse 1. That's precisely what she starts to do.

Most of the English translations. Suggest. Translate it something like. Esther put on royal clothes. Or royal garments. Or royal robes. Or something like that. But in actual fact.

In the original Hebrew. There is no message of. No. Sorry. Mention. Of clothes. Literally what the Hebrew says. Is that. Esther put on her royals.

[6 : 01] Or something like that. And. The meaning. Seems to me. Not so much that. Esther put on her royal robes. As that Esther robed herself.

In her royalty. She was going to come before the king. As queen. And of course. The. Storyteller. The narrator here. Has in mind. That. Appearance. Or rather. Non-appearance. Of Vashti. Before. Xerxes.

Vashti. Vashti. Had. Started life. As a queen. A noble woman. With a crown. And yet. She had been summoned. And treated. Like a concubine. And she had.

Refused to come. And because of that. She had. Been. Put aside. Possibly. Even lost her life. We don't know. Whether she was executed. Or not. But certainly.

[6 : 57] She was removed. From her. Position. As queen. In contrast. Esther. Started life. Really. To be honest. As a concubine. Didn't she? That's how her career started.

She was just one of these virgins. Who were moved into the. Harem. But. She had been. Raised. To the. Position of.

Queen. And now. She's going to live it. Now. She is. Truly. Regal. Vashti.

Had refused. To come to the king. When she was summoned. But Esther. Was going to come.

Uninvited. But she was going to come. As queen. And there are other contrasts.

Here too. In this first section. Xerxes. You notice. Has the trappings. Of royalty. Xerxes. Is the one. With the throne. The one.

[7 : 53] With the palace. The one. With the golden scepter. This sort of. Golden stick. Which is a. A symbol of. Royal authority. I think our own queen. Has one. I don't think. She uses it much.

But. There is one. But. It's really. The. Narrator. Is telling us here. It's not really.

Xerxes. Who is royal here. It is Esther. Up to now. With. Just one exception. Esther.

Is not. Given. The title. Queen Esther. She's. Described as. Queen. Sometimes. But. The only. Occasion. On which. She's actually. Given her full title.

Of Queen Esther. Is when. She reported. To. The king. The. The plot. Of. That. Mordecai. Had uncovered. And that's the only time.

[8 : 49] When she's given her full title. As Queen Esther. It's as if. The narrator is saying. Well up to this point. That's really the only. Queenly thing. She's done. But now.

In chapter 5. Verse 2. And particularly. In chapter 5. Verse 12. And onwards. In the story. She's. Usually. Not on every occasion.

But very frequently. Given her full title. From now on. She is. Queen Esther. So now on. Our narrator is saying. She's deserving.

Of the title. She is now. She had the title. She'd had. She'd been queen. For about five years. But. Now at this stage. She's grown into it. Now she's really queen.

There is of course. One critical moment. Will the king accept her. Or will he reject her. And have her killed. But.

[9 : 47] Xerxes. He sees Esther. In her royal beauty. And remembers. Who he's been ignoring. And neglecting. Remember he hadn't summoned her. For 30 days. Been too busy. With his. Drinking pal.

Haman. But. He sees Esther. And realises. What had been missing. Remembers. What had been missing. And so he holds out. His scepter. And grants her.

A royal audience. In verse 2. And from that point on. Esther is largely. In control of events. Although of course. Not without. Considerable amount of help.

From divine providence. But. It is Esther now. Who. Makes the pace. Who drives the pace. As it were. Notice that.

Esther has already. Had the banquet prepared. She didn't just go. On the off chance. And thinks. Oh gosh. What. What I better do. She's already got. The banquet ready. It's all set out ready.

[10:41] In the banqueting hall. Unlike. Haman's plot. Who. Let things fester. For. As I said. For 11 months.

And that was really. Going to be. His great mistake. Esther here. Pushes things on. She leaves no opportunity. For things to go. Sour. Xerxes and Haman. Are hustled. Into the feast. Did you notice that. In verse 5. Bring Haman quickly. Liberally. Plied with wine. Xerxes. Is bewitched.

By his queen. And he makes. The usual. Sort of rash. Promise. That kings make. On these. Occasions. Anything up to. Half my kingdom. Surely.

This is the time. For Esther. To strike. And it looks. As though. She's going to. Doesn't it. She starts off. My wish. And my request. Is. But then.

[11:36] She stops. Something. Stops. So. We don't know. Whether it was. Her original plan. All along. Or whether. She suddenly thought. No. This isn't the right. Moment.

We're not told. But something. Told her. No. This is not. The moment. I need to delay. A little longer. So. She says. My wish. And my request. Is that.

You come back. Tomorrow. And then. I'll tell you. What I want. What I want. And of course. That just gives. Even more time. For Xerxes. To stew over it. As he's. Going to do. Come back.

Tomorrow. When the party. And the action. Will continue. And then. We read. Of. The first time. When Haman. Goes home. And a series. Of coincidences. Or divine providences. Are going.

Building up. To Haman's. Downfall. So Haman.

[12:33] Leaves the palace. In high spirits. Puffed off. Even more than usual. By the queen's attention. But then. In the outer. He passes. Through the outer office. On his way home. He sees.

Mordecai. His enemy. There's another. Irony here. Isn't it. There. He doesn't. Wonder. Why Mordecai. Is there. In spite.

Of his high office. He's not. Noticed. The messages. That Esther. And Mordecai. Have been passing. To each other. And of course. That's. Going to prove. To be a. Crucial failure. Of intelligence.

His pride. And his overconfidence. Are leading him. To fall. And he can tolerate. Mordecai. No longer. It seems. He can't wait. For the 11 months. To run out. And Mordecai.

To meet his fate. With the rest of the Jews. As long as Mordecai. Is still there. In the outer office. He cannot be happy. And so. His buoyant mood. Collapses.

[13:29] And he goes home. To have a. A whinge. To his. Household. God. So he does. Boast. Of the.

As if he's trying to bolster himself. Of all his riches. And honors. That he's had. But he says. Doesn't mean a thing to me. While Mordecai. The Jew. Still lives. Notice that.

He does tell. His wife. And his friends. That Mordecai. Is a Jew. Even that. Is ironical. Because. Zeresh.

His wife. At least. Has not forgotten. The ancient feud. Between the Amalekites. And the Jews. And that is going to. She's going to. Bring it up again later. But when it's too late.

This was perhaps. Zeresh's last chance. To save her husband. From his folly. But instead of doing that. What does she do? She eggs him on. The 75 feet.

[14:27] The 50 cubits. Of verse 14. The. Commentators suggest. Is probably a figure. Of speech. Rather than being. Intended to be taken. Very literally. It's rather like. One might say.

That. A footballer might say. I kicked a goal. But I missed by miles. Because he's not really. Missed by miles. The meaning probably. Is that this is going to be. Something. Mega.

You know. Something. You can't miss it. It's going to. Tower over the whole city. It's unlikely. It really was 75 feet high. And that's. Hardly very practicable. But. It's going to be something.

That's visible. From all over the city. That you can't miss. This execution. Of Mordecai. Is going to be. The political event. Of the year. He's going to be. Completely humiliated.

Only. They haven't actually. Built it yet. But. Haman is entranced. By this idea. Yes. Let's do it now. By this time.

[15:22] It's probably getting towards evening. Work up. The workmen have probably all gone home. For their evening meal. Or something. But. No. Get them out. I want it built now. Can't we build it tomorrow?

No. I want it now. If I'd wanted it tomorrow. I would have ordered it tomorrow. That's Haman's attitude. Isn't it? But the timber yard will be shut. I don't care. Wake up the manager.

I want it now. And so. Eventually. He gets. Everything happening. And the workmen set off. Get to work. And so. Haman.

Again. Totally impatient. Heads back. Straight back to the palace. Because he still has to get permission from Xerxes. To hang. Mordecai. Excuse me.

So here's Haman on his way back to the palace. And meanwhile.

[16:19] What's happened. What's happening back at the palace. Well Xerxes is having a bad night. He can't sleep. I don't know.

Perhaps he was hoping that Esther was going to stay the night. But she's gone back to her quarters. Sleep eludes him. What's to be done. Summon a concubine.

No. No. Not with Esther filling his senses. What's to be done. I know. I mean. I am like Haman. Well. People have got to do my building. Wake up the secretaries.

But. They're all asleep. Don't care. Wake up the secretaries. We'll have readings from the royal records. What we don't know is whether he was really interested.

Or perhaps this was his equivalent of counting sheep. We get the impression that Xerxes was not really very interested in administration. He probably thought if they read the records out it would be so boring.

[17:18] I'll go back to sleep. But. But actually. That's not what happens. A particular passage catches his attention.

And now he's fully awake. Now he can't. Really can't sleep. He's reminded. Of that assassination plot that Mordecai had foiled. And he realizes that Mordecai had not received the elevation.

That the knighthood or whatever the Persian equivalent was. That he should have got. For that service. And now impulsive king Xerxes is in.

He's in a hurry too. He's not going to wait either. This has to be done now. So Haman has rushed back to the palace.

To get permission to hang Mordecai. But Xerxes is still king. And his plan takes precedence. Who's in the palace? Oh Haman's just come back.

[18:19] Great. Haman. Yeah. Nobody knows how to put on a good show better than Haman. Just the man I need. And of course because Xerxes is the king. He gets the word in.

Before Haman can come out with his plea about hanging Mordecai. Xerxes speaks to Haman. Come up with a plan.

What can we do to honour the one that the king wants to have? To honour. And of course crucially. Xerxes omits one crucial fact. Doesn't he? The name of who the honoree is.

Actually the commentators and interpreters have a field day with this. Is it. Was it just a. An omission on Xerxes part. Or was Xerxes actually beginning to tire of Haman already.

And was he deliberately setting up. Setting him up. We don't know. But either way. He omits this rather vital piece of information. And so because Haman. Again puffed up.

[19:17] By his. Arrogance. Gets the wrong end of the stick entirely. And. Thinks that. Xerxes is planning something for him. He doesn't ask himself if this makes any sense.

Why would Xerxes suddenly be planning this honour for him in the middle of the night. He assumes it's for him and he makes his proposal. And even this proposal is quite strange or at least quite special.

Because what Haman suggests here amounts almost to a proclamation of royalty. A robe the king has worn. A horse the king has ridden and even with a royal crest on the horse.

A horse. And a nobleman to accompany it. Yeah that's just what we need. Because normally if you're going to have some sort of royal honour.

It takes weeks and weeks to plan it doesn't it. But actually there's nothing here that's going to take very long to do. You've just got to go and get the horse out of the stable.

[20:29] Go and get the. The butler to get the. Robe out of the cupboard. It can be done now. And of course that's exactly what Xerxes wants. Yes Haman that's a great plan.

You go and carry it out. And of course now of course is when he tells Haman. Who is to be honoured in this way. And of course it's Mordecai. And so Mordecai had come to the palace hoping to humiliate.

Sorry Haman had come to the palace hoping to humiliate Mordecai. But instead it's Haman who is humiliated. And he'd come hoping to hang Mordecai on the gallows.

But the gallows remains empty still waiting its first use. And Haman had hoped to make Mordecai's downfall.

As I say the political event of the year. But instead as people are just waking up for breakfast. There is this royal parade. And they look out. What on earth is going on?

[21 : 33] And they see that Mordecai. Is being paraded through the streets on a royal horse. This is the political event that everybody sees. That Mordecai is not humiliated.

But he's elevated. If not quite to royal status. He has given the honour that he deserved. For his loyalty to the king. And of course Haman is completely devastated.

So much so he covers his head up and goes home again. So this time he goes back in complete shame.

And despondency. And goes and talks to his wife and friends again. And in verse 13 of chapter 6. You notice. They deliver their warning altogether too late. Oh Mordecai is a Jew is he? Oh well in that case you're toast. Basically is what they say.

[22 : 49] Just what Haman wanted to hear. They remember. Zeresh remembers now that long string of Amalekite defeats. One thing Esther can't have known of course.

Is that these events were the reason. Real the real reason for Esther's 24 hour delay. The hidden God of the book has started Haman's downfall.

But the events rush on. Esther's busy at the palace. Getting her banquet organised.

And just as the officials had summoned Vashti to a feast. She didn't want to go to. So Haman is summoned to a feast. He probably doesn't want to go to by this stage.

But he has no choice really. They just rush him to the feast. It says in verse 14 of chapter 6. While they were still talking with him.

[23 : 57] The king's eunuchs arrived. And hurried Haman away to the banquet. Esther had prepared. Everything happened so fast. And so we get to the end game.

Esther's final banquet. The second day here probably means the second day of the banquet. In other words.

This is the banquet. It is the second banquet. Not that that banquet lasted two days. The NIV translates it that way. And I think that's what most commentators suggest it means.

That this is the second day. In the sense it's the second banquet that Esther had planned. Once again. Esther plies the king with wine.

And once again. He makes his exaggerated office. Clearly this queen wants something. But what on earth is it? By this time you must be completely hooked.

[25 : 01] Must be completely intrigued. But this time. There's no delay. Esther gets straight to the point. What she wants. Is quite simply. Life for her people.

And for herself. As she burns her boats as it were. And identifies herself. With them. In fact she puts it first. In a sense. Doesn't she? She says. Life for me. And my people.

Grant me my life. This is my partition. And spare my people. This is my request. She puts herself at the head of the cure. In a sense. As the one. Who is going to be destroyed.

By Haman's plot. That's what she wants. Is life for herself.

And for her people. Even so. She has to be a bit careful. Doesn't she? She has to put the right spin on it. It's no good accusing Xerxes himself.

[26 : 03] Of destroying her people. That wasn't. That's never going to fly. Is it? What she has to do. Is carefully. Drive a wedge. Between Xerxes and Haman.

She has to put the blame. Squarely where it belongs. On Haman's shoulders. And so she refers. To the triple wording. Of the edict.

You remember the edict. It talked about. Destruction. Killing. And annihilation. For the people. And she quotes it. Word for word. That's what Haman's edict.

Has said. Destruction. Killing. Annihilation. And she refers. Even obliquely. To Haman's bribe. Doesn't she? Without. Actually.

Accusing. Xerxes. Of taking a bribe. But she says. My people have been sold. Somebody's paid some money. But of course.

[27 : 00] When you. Sell people normally. You would sell them as slaves. But no. Not as slaves. Even if my people. Had been sold as slaves. Well that might have been tolerated. But it's not that.

My people have been. Sold for death. Men and women. And children. All have been. Sold. Into death. The edict is presented.

As a treasonous plot. To destroy herself as queen. To destroy. Mordecai. A loyal official. Who had saved the king's life.

And a loyal. And many loyal citizens. Of the empire. But as yet. She's not. Named. Haman. Haman. As Esther. Deliberately.

Builds. The tension. She needs. Xerxes. To. Separate himself. From this policy. She needs him to. The condemnation.

[27 : 58] Has come from Xerxes. Himself. And it works. Doesn't it. The volatile king. Is absolutely furious. In verse five. Who's done this.

Who could do such a thing. Who could. Try and get rid of my queen. Which of course. Is not exactly. What Haman had intended. But.

That was an implication of it. And now. Esther reveals her target. And in fact. It's not. It's not really a sentence.

In the Hebrew. The NIV. Kind of smooths it over. But I gather. What the Hebrew says. It says. This man. Adversary. Enemy. Villain. Haman.

He's named. And so Xerxes. Is forced to choose. Isn't he. He's forced to choose.

[28 : 57] Between his. Earth's wild friend. And his queen. But actually. Now there's no contest. Xerxes. Feels totally betrayed. By Haman. By this stage.

He's entirely. On Esther's side. As the narrator. Puts it. In verse six. It's the royal couple. Versus Haman. Now. Xerxes.

Is so angry. He goes outside. To walk it off. In fact. It's so angry. That he even puts. His wine mug down. Did you notice that? It takes a lot. To separate.

Xerxes. From his wine. But he's so angry. He goes out. In the garden. To walk it off. Haman. Stays behind. And that's.

His last mistake. He stays. It says to beg Esther. But whatever his motive is. He makes this final. Breach of court.

[29 : 55] Protocol. Palace protocol. Doesn't he? Apparently. The protocol of such things. In those days. That if you wanted to speak. To any member of the harem. You had to. You had to.

I think it was somebody. I read somewhere. Something like. Seven paces away. Seven steps away. You weren't even allowed. To preach. To. Come close to any member. Of the harem. Certainly. Not the queen.

And in touching. The queen's couch. For whatever reason. It's really putting the last nail. In his coffin. And this of course. Is the last.

Coincidence. That finally. Finishes him off. Xerxes. Comes back in. And sees. Haman. Leaning. Leaning on the queen's couch. He immediately. He immediately. Accuses. Haman. Of assaulting. His queen. Who's given. No chance. To speak.

[30 : 49] Even if she wanted to. What do we find. Haman. Has no friends. Here. Does he. No. He has friends. Out in the country. And home. But Haman. Has no friends. Left in the palace. In fact. You notice.

The officials. Jump at the chance. To get rid of this. Hated. Usurper. Who's. Sort of. Taken over. The reins of the palace. It's clear. That the officials. Hate him. As soon as the word. Comes out of the king's mouth. They cover his face. For execution. And then. Harbona. Just. Conveniently. Remembers. That. Gallows. That. Haman. Had built. Harbona. Is one of the kings. One of the seven. Chief eunuchs. Who had been sent.

[31 : 45] For Vashti. In chapter one. One of the officials. In the palace. But it's. To be honest. It's a lynch mob. Isn't it? But. Haman.

Has given. No chance. To defend. No trial. No chance. To defend himself. And yet. One. Cannot deny. That in this case. At least. Justice is done. The officials.

Can't wait. To get rid of Haman. They act. As quickly. As they can. Before the king. Changes his mind again. They know their king. They know how. Volatile he is.

So they. Make sure. That it happens quickly. And so Haman is hanged. Or. Possibly impaled. People argue about what. Exactly what the punishment was. Whether it was hanged. With a rope. Or.

Whether it was actually. Impalement. On the pole. For whatever it is. The. Humiliation. The death. That had been planned. For Mordecai. Goes to Haman.

[32 : 40] Instead. The king has seen. Haman's treason. For himself. And justice. Has been done. What a tremendous story.

What a. Pace there is to it. What. How it's cleverly. It's told. What do we make. To make of this. Black farce.

What are we supposed to learn. Well that central passage of the. Story of course. Is.

Those coincidences. Xerxes bad night. Haman coming back into the palace. At the crucial time.

And the secretary reading. Those. The story.

Or the. The fact. The fact that Mordecai. Had not received the. Knighthood he was entitled to. What is to be made of this. It's.

[33 : 37] Surely not that these are just coincidences. But there is. A God. A hidden God. God who sometimes hides. Is working. And yet who is in control of these things.

It's not. Xerxes. Who raises people up. And pulls them down. Xerxes. It's not. Haman who does it. It's not Mordecai.

It's not even Esther. She is. Noticeably absent from this. Central. Bit of the story. It is the hidden God. The God who.

Rules in the affairs of men. Who over rules in these things. So God. Protects his people. Through these providences. But not only through these providences.

It is also true that when. God. Wants to save. Generally speaking. He does it through. Human agency. He provides a.

[34 : 37] A hero. Or in this case. A heroine. A champion. The right woman. In the right place. At the right time. And as such.

That is a picture. Isn't it. Of the way. That God saves. Esther is a picture. Pointing us to Christ. To the true champion. The ultimate champion.

The one who gave his life. To save. His people. And liberate his people. That surely is the first. Lesson of this. And the most important one.

But I think there are other lessons. That we can learn as well. And it's worth thinking about. So secondly. We might ask. How was Esther's transformation. Effective.

How did she. Suddenly change. Apparently within. A day or so. From being a rather naive. Girl. To. This effective. Queen.

[35 : 36] How was it. How did she obtain that grace. How was she transformed. Well. It was through the word of God. Wasn't it. It was effectively. Through Mordecai's challenge.

Do not think. That because you are in the king's house. You alone of all the Jews. Will escape. For if you remain silent at this time. Relief and deliverance for the Jews.

Will arise from another place. But you and your father's family. Will perish. Who knows. That you've come to royal estate. To royal position. For such a time as this. These were God's words.

Through Mordecai. To Esther. And. The word of God. Always does what it sets out to do. And it was that really. Which changed her life. Wasn't it. These words of God.

By taking heed to that word. By identifying herself. With the people of God. By putting her faith. In their God. Even if he's not in here named. That's the way that she's ennobled.

[36 : 39] And is able to take on. Royalty. Faith isn't a weak. Easy. Believisism. You know. We just. Yeah. I agree to that in principle.

Faith is transformational. And the word of God. Always. Achieves. What it sets out to do.

Remember those words. From the book of Hebrews. The word of God.

Is living and active. Sharper than. Any double-edged sword. It penetrates. Even to dividing. Soul and spirit. Joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts.

And attitudes. Of the heart. And that of course. Is why. As a church. At the center. Of everything we do. Is preaching the word. There's all sorts of things.

We could do. On a Sunday. On a Sunday evening. And. Some of the good things. To do. But at the center. The. Key thing. The enabling thing.

[37 : 34] Is the sword of the spirit. Which is the word of God. And so that's at the center. Of all we do. It's sharper. Than a double-edged sword.

Penetrating to dividing. Soul and spirit. Joints and marrow. And Mordecai's words. Cut to Esther's heart. Didn't they? Up to then. She'd just been. Sort of enjoying her life.

In the palace. It seems. But suddenly. She realized. There was more to being a queen. Than that. And because of her faith. She was not found wanting.

The fear of the Lord. Says Proverbs. Is the beginning. Of wisdom. And thirdly. There was a third. Perhaps more problematic.

Consideration. That we could make. It's undoubtedly true. Isn't it? That Esther made use. Of her knowledge. Of the king. She made use.

[38 : 33] Of her knowledge. Of his predilections. And weaknesses. To achieve her aim. She didn't just. Turn up in the king's. Throne room. And blurt out her.

Plea. She buttered the king up. As one might say. She even tantalized him. A little. With her feminine charm. And with her. Dissembling.

Not immediately. Saying. What it was she wanted. So that he was ready. When she made her accusation. She said.

Indeed. As I said. At the beginning. Of this series. Is politics. As the art. Of the possible. If you like. The achievable. It is worth. Asking ourselves. How ethical. Was this?

Certainly. Paul warns us. Against using. Underhand. Worldly ways. 2 Corinthians. 10. 3 to 5. And yet. On the other hand. He wasn't averse. To making use. Of his status.

[39 : 29] As a Roman citizen. Or making use. Of his. Greek education. To address. The people. On the. Aeropagus. He wasn't averse.

To circumcising. Timothy. To get over. The political. Problems. Of getting. Timothy. Into Jerusalem. Jesus himself. Tells us.

Certainly. To be both. Shrewd as snakes. And innocent. As doves. Sometimes. It can perhaps. Be difficult. To be both. Those things. We should be innocent.

We should renounce. Underhand ways. And yet. It's also possible. To. As somebody once said. To be so. So heavenly minded. As to be no earthly use. Sometimes.

We do need. To use means. And it seems to me. At least. In this situation. Esther did nothing illegal. Or even immoral. She was simply acting.

[40 : 28] With the wisdom. That God had given her. And with the talents. And abilities. That God had given her. There's no deceit involved. At most. It was a little dissembling.

God had provided the means. Including. In this case. Her own beauty. And her insight. Into the king's character. And she employed. What God had given her.

But certainly. This requires. Wisdom. The use of. Means. Always requires. I think. A little wisdom. It's so easy. To be. Caught up. You know. We think.

If we had better music. Perhaps. Then. You know. People would be. More. Able to listen. To the word of God. And that's probably. Actually true. And yet.

It's so easy. Isn't it. For that to become. A distortion. I think. The narrator. The narrator is. Indorsing. What Esther did here.

[41 : 24] I think. Sometimes. It is right. To use. The means. That God has provided. For us. To. To. Achieve. The work. Of the kingdom. That certainly.

We need. To pray. For wisdom. To do it. So. I'll stop there. It's not quite. The end of the book. Because. There's still. The mess. To be cleaned up.

And that's. What the last few. Chapters are about. But this. Of course. Is the heart. Of the book. Of Esther. So. Chris. Are you going to. Come out. We're having. Some group prayer time.

Are we. So. If you'd like. To come out. And. Lead us in prayer. And then. Organize us. Then. If you. Yeah. And. But we also. Oh.

We haven't sung. Sorry. Quite well. We haven't sung. The last song. Haven't we. Sorry. You're quite. Quite right. Thank you.