

Mordecai honoured

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Date: 18 July 2021

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[0:00] Tonight we're looking at Esther chapter 6.

And before we dive into the verses in this chapter, I think it would be good if we just refresh our minds quickly on the characters that we'll be reading about and exactly where we are in the book. So my introduction will be that really, just a refresher of where we're at. So we've got it upstairs. So the book of Esther, it's around 470 years before the coming of Christ.

And we're following the story of a very beautiful young lady named Esther or Hadassah, you might find in some of your Bibles, as she becomes queen of the Persian Empire.

And some of my notes are cut off here. One second. Esther was an orphan and she was raised by her older cousin, Mordecai. Esther and Mordecai Jews.

[1:11] And that is that they are the people of God living in the Persian Empire ruled at the time by King Xerxes or Ahasuerus. I'm going to call him Xerxes because that's what's in my translation.

And I struggled to say Ahasuerus. So the empire, the Persian Empire, as we know from chapter one, verse one, was very large in modern day terms.

It ranged from India all the way past Egypt and round to Ethiopia. And the book of Esther takes place in the province of Susa, which is there.

I don't know if you can actually see my cursor on screen sharing, which is modern day Iran. So King Xerxes, having deposed his queen, got rid of his queen, ordered hundreds of young women to be taken from their families from all over this empire.

And whichever young woman could please the king the most was to become queen. And this queen was, as we know, to be Esther.

[2:17] And we saw that right from the beginning, she was favoured by just the right people at just the right time. As we went through the story. And although God isn't mentioned once, and this book is famous for that, we've seen through many different coincidences and ironies that God is clearly there.

And he's operating within the story and bringing out, bringing about his purposes for his people. So tonight's chapter focuses on two of the characters that we've read about so far, Mordecai and Haman.

And I think we should remind ourselves of what's occurring between these two characters. So Mordecai and Haman, the feud.

So Haman enters the story in chapter three. We greet him as an official to the king. He'd just been elevated in status above all the other king's nobles.

And as the chapters progress, we really see the nature of Haman's really despicable character. So after Haman was elevated in status, the king decreed that all the officers at the king's gate should bow down and honour him.

[3:36] So Haman walked out of the citadel. And although all the other officials to the king bowed down and honoured him, Mordecai refused to.

If you're interested as to why that happened, there's quite a complex, some complex arguments there. I really recommend going back to Jerome's sermon, which is on YouTube. He unpacked this very, very well recently.

So in response to Mordecai's refusal, Haman not only wanted to kill him, but he also put a plan together for genocide against all of the Jews throughout the Persian Empire.

And so this this feud begins. I call it a feud. It is rather one sided since all of the power appears to lay in the hands of Haman.

So in order to progress this plot to kill all of the Jews, Haman needed the king's authority, King Xerxes. And he tries to bribe him and convince him that it's really in his best interest to destroy all the Jewish people.

[4:43] The king refuses the bribe, but gives Haman permission to do what he wants with the people. So this threat of destruction and genocide hangs over all of God's people throughout the provinces of Persia.

Mordecai's response, as we as we've seen, is one of mourning. He goes into the city in sackcloth and ashes, wailing and distressed.

We also saw that his heart was not without hope, as we saw in a few communications to Queen Esther, where he emphasizes that in the famous, famous verses, the deliverance will come from another place if the queen chooses not to act.

Indirectly, we heard that he was saying that God will save his people. But Esther must make a choice to help or not. And either way, her life would be at stake.

So the queen would call the Jews to fast for three days. And at the end of those three days, she would go to the king and in doing this, risk her life.

[5:52] The king extended his scepter to her. He accepted her and he, well, with the king's permission, Esther holds a banquet.

And only Haman, the king and Esther are present at this at this banquet. And it looks very much like she's just about to reveal all to the king of her Jewish heritage and ask people to ask for her people, the Jewish people throughout the provinces, to be released from what is a death sentence for her as well.

But then Esther suddenly delays. There's a pause in her in her action. It seems the timing was not right. And so she requests of the king a second banquet for the following day.

So Haman leaves this banquet full of beans, not literally speaking figuratively. But as he went past the king's gate, he saw Mordecai, who still refused to bow down and honor him.

Now, this is where this feud is coming in. Of course, Haman was enraged again. In fact, the only thing that brought him any delight and peace that night was the thought of having Mordecai killed and hung on a pole outside his home.

[7:23] And I think this really brings up the kind of character that Haman was. What kind of man would do you have to be for that to delight you?

Despicable, despicable character. So it's the night before the second banquet. We're in chapter six now.

And in fact, it's likely to be not so much the night, but it's likely to be the early hours of the morning. And the chapter opens on King Xerxes, who can't sleep mysteriously.

The king orders that one of his attendants read to him from the book of the Chronicles. I think it's good to point out at this point that this book would have been filled with all kinds of incidents and events from the king's reign.

This wouldn't have been. I know the illustration kind of shows it as one piece of parchment. But it's likely there was a lot of information in this book, maybe even several books compiled.

[8:42] When I was reading about this, I found out that ancient, I'm not really a history buff, if I'm being honest, but the ancient Greek historian Herodotus makes reference to these books several times in his writings.

So the content of this would have likely been largely quite boring, probably for most people. There'd be snapshots of things which are significant to the king, but probably less so to the actual course of history.

And I wonder if that's why he was having his attendants read to him from these from these books to kind of drop him off back to sleep. These books remind me very much like an ancient, an ancient Facebook page with posts of things that happened throughout the king's day.

Here's a very rare photograph of a page from the Chronicles of King Xerxes. I'll let you digest that.

So Xerxes orders his staff to read the accounts of his reign back to him.

What's going on there? That brings us to verse two. So the morning is creeping in as the attendants are reading, and it's not not certain how long they were reading for exactly.

[10:16] But it just so happens that the king's attendant comes across the record of Mordecai foiling the assassination plot against the king.

It covers that in verse two, but I thought we'd just go back and have a look at that very quickly. So it's thought that Mordecai worked in the citadel to some official capacity.

We don't know exactly what that was, but he was often found at the king's gate. So whilst he was waiting at the king's gate one day, he discovers that two of the king's officers were planning to assassinate the king.

Mordecai uncovered the plot and he reported it to Esther and then saved the king's life. And the king had this incident recorded as a post in his king book, as we would say.

But no formal recognition of Mordecai's service to the king took place. And I thought this was amazing. But when I first read it, I thought it's amazing that that could be forgotten.

[11:25] I'm sure that if any one of us here, if we had our life saved suddenly, we'd want to be in almost like an instant reaction, wouldn't it? To to thank a person and to to give them recognition and to really respond.

But there was a silence. There's a pause where this was not happening. And I think this was intentional. I think God was causing this this space.

And so. That was somehow somehow forgotten. So verse three, King Xerxes is suddenly moved into thinking of rewarding Mordecai for his loyalty.

And he asked his attendants if if anything has yet been done for Mordecai. So he wasn't aware that anything had not been done. He was just just thinking about this now.

And to which the response was. No, I'm behind on my slides. I'm not used to doing this. No. So nothing had been done.

[12:30] And he. As we've seen, really impulsive king springs into action straight away. And he says, who is in the court?

And the king is about to use whoever's instantly available to serve in honoring Mordecai. He's going to make this happen. He's going to make it happen right now. And coincidentally.

Who just turns up in the courtyard? Haman. He's nice and happy in that picture.

The verse reminds us just why he's there. Haman is there to request that King Xerxes has Mordecai killed and impaled on the pole that Haman had set up, as we heard earlier.

514. Chapter five, verse 14 says that Haman was to visit the king in the morning. And that's how we know now that it's now morning. So verse five, the king orders Haman in.

[13:38] Now, I want us to put ourselves in Haman's position just for a moment. He must be feeling pretty smug right now.

I would have thought he'd been elevated to the highest of positions. He'd been invited to dinner with the king and queen. He'd be given free reign by the king to execute the Jews, to commit genocide.

It's a massive, massive thing. And now he's got Mordecai. To use a boxing analogy, he's got Mordecai on the ropes. And he was just about to deliver the knockout blow by having him executed.

And so I can imagine him kind of strutting into the king's presence almost with the highest of expectations. You know, he feels he's really best friends with this king.

And after everything he's experienced, I'm sure he thinks that asking the king to put Mordecai to death was probably, probably nothing. It's verse six.

[14:41] Before Haman gets a chance to say anything, before he gets a chance to speak, the king asks Haman, What should be done for the man the king delights to honor? Now Haman thought to himself, Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?

And I'd like to point out this oozing ego that's coming out of Haman. And when you look back at his attitude towards things, everything is Haman, Haman, Haman.

It's all about him. Real, real deep egotistical issues. You know, when I was a boy, I remember at Christmas, my mum taking me to Hannington's in town.

I wonder who here remembers Hannington's. We have a show of hands. Yeah, there's quite a few people. Yeah. There's a picture of Hannington's.

I'm going to make you all feel really old now. That's been closed for 20 years. I couldn't believe it when I saw that. I thought, no, there's no way. But it was 20 years, 2001.

[15:46] Apparently it closed in June. Does anybody know why my mum might have taken me as a boy to Hannington's at Christmas? Sorry.

Yes, it was the Father Christmas was there. I know, because I took my daughter when we used to go there. Yeah. At Christmas time. That's right.

Yeah. Went to see Santa at Santa's Grotto. So I remember it very clearly for some reason. So I would wait outside until Santa's attendance, his magical attendance would say that I could enter. And then I went inside this magical cave, which to young eyes looked a little something like this. A wonderful, real magical, awe-inspiring place.

My eyes were probably like this. In reality, it probably looked more like this. Young eyes have a way of a magical way of forming the truth.

[16:58] And so I go into the I went into the grotto and this middle aged man who had a fake beard and smelled a bit like coffee would put me on his knee. And he'd ask, what would you like for Christmas, little boy?

Now, I knew he wasn't Santa, but I could see that he had a big box of gifts next to him. And I thought the best thing to do would be just to think of the best gift I could think of.

Just in case in one of those little boxes was a new BMX or a new bike. It never happened. But I did get nice things. And so I thought of this as how Haman must feel going into the king at this point.

I mean, he really must have thought all his dreams were about to come true. You know, he's got everything he wanted. And, you know, he's just about to destroy his opponent and receive honors from the king in the same morning in front of the whole city.

No. No. Verse seven and eight. Haman presents his ideas of what should be done for the man that the king delights to honor, i.e. what he wants for himself.

[18:14] A royal robe that the king has worn. A royal horse that the king has ridden. And a royal crest on the horse's head.

This is unusual. This would be something in my research found that this would be something similar to a crown and would just identify the rider as belonging to the kingdom.

I would say when you look at that imagery, I think it's pretty clear what Haman wants. He wants all the glory of the king, but he wants it for himself.

And here is that that vanity coming up again. That ego. He doesn't want the honor for to go to the king. He wants the honor for himself.

He wants all the glory. And I think that's confirmed in verse nine. When Haman says in response to the king, he says.

[19:12] One of the king's most noble princes should adorn the man the king chooses with the royal robe and lead him through the city. And we saw how Haman dreams not.

Not just of being bowed down to and revered by the officials at the king's gate. It's not enough for him. He wants the whole city to bow down to him and to give him this honor in this worship.

He's not satisfied with what he what he had. He wants more. But back in reality, he standing in front of the king and he's probably smiling away.

And in verse 10. King says, hurry to Haman. And you can imagine his eyes lighting up. Oh, get it.

Get it. It's going to be really good. Then King Xerxes commands Haman to do all this for Mordecai. I can imagine the horror that must have gone across his face.

[20:16] And he insisted that no detail is missed. I think what's what's being said there is that there's no escape in this this task.

There is there's no way of getting out of this. There's no way that Haman could deny the king. And so we see a sudden, very sudden shift.

So the king. Just happened to not be able to sleep, as we said earlier. This reminder to the king that Mordecai had saved his life just happened to come up as Haman entered the court.

Saving Mordecai and putting Haman in a position where he couldn't be touched. Yeah.

Putting Haman, putting Mordecai in a position where he couldn't be touched is what I meant there.

So Haman, what we're seeing is a role reversal. Haman had Mordecai going back to the boxing analogy on the ropes.

[21:32] And he's about to deliver that that knockout blow to his opponent and take the victory. And it looked set. It really did. But suddenly he misses wildly and he falls.

And now in a matter of seconds, the whole thing is shifted around. And now it's Haman who is on the ropes. And we have to acknowledge here what a turnaround this is in the story for both men.

The roles have been completely reversed. Verse 11. Haman, who thought himself of the highest position under the king, demanded to be honored by Mordecai, is now firmly shadowed by him. And he has to lead the royal horse with Mordecai on through the streets of the city, proclaiming Mordecai as honored by the king. The reverence that Haman so desired is given to the man that he most hated.

And when we look at the details of this this reversal, it's really quite interesting in terms of the picture that we see, because Mordecai has gone from sackcloth and ashes and having his head covered in grief to being elevated above the adversary and covered with the king's royal robes in honor.

[22:55] They really are two ends of the spectrum, aren't they? Gone from complete desolation in his spirit to to to reverence. And in contrast, verse 12, we reverse 12.

Haman has gone from being in the king's honor and revered by the people of the city to rushing home with his head covered in grief. So his head's covered in grief. It isn't a metaphorical expression.

He would have wrapped his head in his mantle or his cloak. And this this this word of rushing. I wonder if he was rushing home quickly to prevent people from seeing exactly who he was of embarrassment for this this fall from from grace that that we've seen.

So. So. Haman's reaction to to run back home and quite frustrated and obviously angry, as we've seen him before, is quite a reaction.

It's something that's not thought through. It's a knee jerk reaction. I think it's an emotional reaction, whereas Mordecai, on the other hand, returned, seemed to return back to his duty at the king's gate, whatever that duty was.

[24:15] And there's a noticeable humility, I think, there in the way he returns to how Mordecai returned to his normal daily routine without complaining. And I thought this was amazing.

There's a tendency there, isn't there? When God gives us good things to not appreciate them and carry on as if we we deserve them once we've got them. But I think not so for Mordecai.

And I think there's a lesson for us there in in seeing that. So we've seen a large number of times already in the book of Esther.

We've covered it a couple of times tonight. The unlikely coincidences and ironies that take place, which we clearly can see God's hand working in.

And this event is no different. Excuse me. And it seems that this unlikely turn turnaround between Haman and Mordecai has not escaped the attention of of Haman's posse, either his people, his family and his friends.

[25:20] So verse 13. Coming towards the end of the chapter now. Haman gets home. Firstly, this this is this is where where the chapter is going goes a bit more, a bit more complex, a bit more packed in what we're reading.

So Haman gets home. And firstly, we have to know who he's who he's speaking to. So the verse first says that he told his wife and friends.

So he's gone back home. He's rushed back home and he's bleating to his his wife and friends. But notice that the response that he gets comes from his wife and advisers.

So in Hebrew, in the Hebrew, this word for advisers means literally, apparently wise men. Haman tells them all of everything that has transpired.

And this is really where it comes to the crunch time in the chapter and their reactions tell us everything we need to know. If I'm being being frank. Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him.

[26:36] You will surely come to ruin. Imagine how discouraged Haman would have been on hearing that response.

He probably went to all of them for some comfort. But I suspect. Haman's wife and advisers have just found themselves as the mouthpiece of God proclaiming what is to happen to Haman.

Because they all appear to be in agreement in agreement. And what they say is is loaded with truth. And this is vastly different from what we what we saw in the last chapter, where they were on Haman's side and calling for the execution of Mordecai.

And let's just break down their response very quickly. Where's my mouse going? Okay. Okay. Your downfall has begun.

This word downfall in the Hebrew unsurprisingly means literally to fall. Usually with the implication of falling prostrate completely flat on the ground face down.

[27:48] And they know that this isn't a one off, that this is just the beginning. And there's wisdom in what they're saying here. And this is why I say that this is they have become the mouthpiece at this point, the mouthpiece of God.

God is using these people to talk to Haman. They know this is not just a one off. It reminds me of the verse from 1 Corinthians 10. Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

Mordecai is of the Jews. Your translation may may not have. I don't think it has it in the NIV. I can't remember what I was using there.

But it may not have the conditional clause if it's actually there in some translations. And it's there in the Hebrew. But I'm sure there's even though the if if Mordecai is of the Jews, when it says that, I don't think there's any real doubt in their minds.

At this point, the Mordecai is a Jew. And he announced it in chapter three. I think that's it's just a way that the language is used. So this statement absolutely does come with a note of certainty.

[29:02] It's ringing with certainty. You will not prevail, stand, overcome these these things, but will surely fall before him.

And again, exactly the same words are used for this picture of falling. So I think this is classic emphasis by repetition. We've got full. You're going to surely fall.

And there is no uncertainty. The condition on which Haman stands or falls rests on one factor. And it's not his power and it's not his ego.

It's not his position and it's not his wealth. It all hangs on Mordecai being one of God's people. They have Persian wise men here. Haman has his his Persian wise men.

They probably know history very well and they probably know something of the incredible victories that God gave to his people, Israel. And I think they're drawing on this to some extent.

[29:57] And with the rather extraordinary circumstances involving Mordecai being honored by King Xerxes at just the right time, evading death and being elevated above the adversary, Haman.

I think they can see something of God's hand in this. And their response is the certain truth. You will not prevail. You will not prevail against the God of the Jews.

Verse 14. Whilst they were still speaking, the king's eunuchs arrived and rushed him to the banquet that Esther had prepared. And so just going back to my boxing analogy, the bell rings.

It's the end of the round. And out of nowhere, Mordecai suddenly has the upper hand in this feud. Haman is falling and it looks like he's in danger and there's no way back up.

So who will win? I'll have to tune in next week to find out. I have some conclusions. One main conclusion, really.

[31:08] And to be honest, this leapt out at me in the text. And I think it's I think it's I think it's fairly it's fairly clear. But we'll just we'll just draw that out. Beyond all expectations, predictions and likeliness, we've seen in one day Mordecai go from mortal danger, sackcloth and ashes to being protected and honored by the king and clothed with a royal robe.

Such events, as we've seen time and time again in Esther, can only come from the hand of God, as we've seen this so many times.

And when we look at the reaction of the Persian wise men and the wife and the friends of Haman and this 180 that they do, in their opinion, the certainty and the sureness of their warning against Haman really says it all.

And it concludes the chapter for us in God's word. So Haman was probably the second most powerful man in the empire. He had the power and the wealth to commit genocide without even a second thought.

And yet he was brought down in mere moments with barely any action from Mordecai, really, except faithfulness and humility. And that is incredible.

[32:27] This is God's work. But this isn't just a story of Haman and Mordecai. I'd like to point this out. It's a story of good versus evil.

Behind the scenes, the real adversary, Satan, is pulling strings and attempting to wipe out the people of God. But God is the ever faithful father and protector to his people.

And I think what's being said here is that there is no adversary that can prevail against the God of Israel. And any attempt to challenge God will be met with failure.

That is a certainty. Not Haman, not King Xerxes, not even Satan can triumph against God. And if we take from that and we put ourselves into the shoes of Mordecai, we gain some valuable lessons from this chapter, which I think we can take into the week.

The world is full of trouble and we are in a battle against the adversary and we might feel battle weary and like we're on the ropes.

[33:42] We sure know that Mordecai felt that way. And we might feel that the adversary is about to beat us down for good. But we don't need to feel that way because the victory already belongs to Jesus.

Death is defeated and our place in God's kingdom is absolutely secure. There is nothing that can challenge God. We don't have to rely on our own cunning or strength, but only the blood of Jesus. And what a magnificent thing that is. And we can approach that with in a similar way to Mordecai with humility and reverence for our king, Jesus.

Jesus says in this world, you will have trouble. Take heart. I've overcome the world. It's already done. So as we bring this chapter to a close, and I thank you for being patient.

I'm not sure how long I've been speaking for, but it seems like quite a while. And we go into the week. I'm going to say to you, let's do so. And I need to hear this as much as anybody.

[34:54] I think remembering the hope and the strength that we have in the victory of our great king, Jesus. We can go with every confidence into the week, knowing that the victory is secure if we put our faith in him.

And I would just like to draw out one more observation. I'd be amiss if I if this was on my mind and I didn't say it. So I could just take a couple more minutes of your time. For Mordecai.

At the position that he was in at the beginning of the chapter, death was just around the corner. It would have been that very next morning.

But God stepped in and swallowed it up and he was elevated. He was taken from where he was out of the reach of the adversary.

He was brought out of weeping out of his sackcloth and ashes and clothed with the king's robe.

Now, I know I usually always end with this verse.

[35:57] It is one of my favorite verses in the Bible, Revelation 7. But I think this is this is very valid. I think there's a picture here. God's people being elevated into God's kingdom in Revelation 7 has some very similar imagery.

I'll read it for you as we close. Then one of the elders asked me, These in white robes, who are they and where did they come from? I answered, Sir, you know.

And he said, These are they who have come out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, our King Jesus. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple.

And he who sits on the throne will shout to them with his presence. Never again will they hunger. Never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat.

For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd. And he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Amen.

[37:02] Thank you for your patience. I trust God has spoken to you through this text.

I know that he spoke to me very clearly. It's a very joyful chapter. Very pleased to read it. So sing our last song, which I have lost.

Rejoicing in hope, we wait for our king. Ruthie, do you have that lined up? Thank you.