

Learning to Trust God's Unseen Hand

A Study of Esther

Esther 5:1-14

Lesson #7: Trust the direction God gives through the practice of spiritual disciplines.

Verses 1-8

- There are two paragraphs in this chapter which add to the story of how God moves, especially when we cannot see or know all the details. On one hand, we have Esther who is preparing to go before the King unannounced, but well prepared. On the other hand we will have two men who are unprepared to handle what is about to be experienced.
- “On the third day” indicates the third day of the fast. Keil says the fast would have lasted from the afternoon of the first day until the morning of the third day, forty or forty-five hours. Esther realized that she should act at once. If she believed that prayer and fasting were effective, her faith would require that she act.
- Esther put on her royal robes,” which must have been beautiful and enhanced her natural beauty. The two words “and stood” must not be overlooked. This was an act of breaking the law by standing in the king’s court without having been called. Esther had come to her moment of truth. She publicly had confronted the king.¹
- The practice of granting requests beforehand is one common among Oriental monarchs. Sometimes no limit at all is placed to the petitioner’s liberty of choice—seldom any less wide limit than that of the present passage. According to Herodotus (ix. 111), there was one day in the year on which the king was bound to grant *any* request made by a guest at his table.² See also Mark 6:23
- Many readers have found this second postponement even more difficult to understand. Recognizing that Esther has already drawn the king into his most comfortable ambience, a dinner, some interpreters attribute this further delay to Esther’s anxiety and loss of nerve. However, neither the words of Esther nor comments by the narrator provide even a hint of Esther’s motivation or strategy. We know only that she asks for another banquet, promising a further word at that time. Whatever the reason for a second banquet, the postponement increases tension in the narrative. Each day’s delay brings the decree of annihilation that much closer to fulfillment.³

¹ Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, electronic ed., vol. 10, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 339.

² H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *Esther*, The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 103.

³ Eugene F. Roop, *Ruth, Jonah, Esther*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2002), 214.

Verses 9-14

- It was a rare privilege for a subject, however high his station, to be permitted to banquet with the king. Occasionally, however, this was allowed, and Haman had reason to feel highly honored at the invitation he received from the queen with the king's permission, which was always required. It should be understood, however, that no equality was meant by this invitation to feast with royalty, and the honored guest was so seated as to remind him of his inferior position in relation to the king.⁴
- This feast revealed the nature of the King and Haman. Haman read into the invitation more than what he should. It certainly served to give him a false sense of security and averted suspicion on his part that something affecting him was afoot. Esther had a plan in mind, and she was setting a well-designed trap for Haman.⁵
- Haman gathered together his friends and his wife to seek their advice. He began by boasting of all his many blessings and achievements, only to lament that it was all worthless so long as Mordecai was free to defy him. Haman is no better than his king; neither chose well those who would guide them.
- There is an arrogance and presumption in both the advice given to and the action taken by Haman. The king was simply to rubberstamp these plans. So confident was Haman of his influence with the king that he did not even have the forethought to delay building the gallows until he had permission to kill his enemy. God hates presumption as he does all other manifestations of pride. Those who dare to append God's name to sanction their own imaginations are singled out for special condemnation: 'But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death' (Deut. 18:20). So are those who assume that God will sanction the plans they have made without bothering to pray.⁶

What the Spiritual Disciplines can help you do...

1. Spiritual disciplines prepare us for hard decisions.

- Esther had to act...she was the only one who was capable of intervening in such a way. Making hard decisions, especially those with spiritual implications require spiritual preparation.

⁴ James M. Freeman and Harold J. Chadwick, *Manners & Customs of the Bible* (North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 1998), 298.

⁵ Derek Prime, *Unspoken Lessons About the Unseen God: Esther Simply Explained*, Welwyn Commentary Series (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2001), 91.

⁶ Colin D. Jones, *Exploring Esther: Serving the Unseen God*, Exploring the Bible Commentary (Leominster, UK: Day One Publications, 2005), 81–82.

2. Spiritual disciplines prevent us from acting in haste.

- Notice the dichotomy of Esther's plans versus the reaction of Xerxes (6:1) and Haman. Esther carefully and calmly used the opportunity to appropriately exploit the character flaws of both Xerxes and Haman.

3. Spiritual disciplines position us to see the bigger picture.

- Both Haman and Xerxes were impacted differently by Esther's banquet. Esther, on the other hand, confidently planned for the next meal in which she would outline her case before the King.