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C1312 – March 27, 2013 – Esther 6:1-7:10
Ahasuerus' Insomnia

Oral arguments over the definition of marriage and California's Proposition 8 which essentially negating same sex marriage. We are at a critical juncture in the courts again, the decision and consequences are being likened to Roe v Wade so we need to be in serious prayer about these things.

Question: Why wasn't a copy of Esther found among the Dead Sea Scrolls?

Answer: It's a good question but difficult to answer. First, we don't know they didn't have a copy. The absence of evidence is not positive but negative evidence. They may have had a copy or copies that were never found or were destroyed. Second, there is one fragment, 4Q550, that some are claiming is a text from Esther or a source for Esther.ⁱ It has several parallels to passages in Esther. Third, in the end, any speculation regarding this question is beyond my pay grade.

Last week we began the climactic portion of the book in Esther 5. In this great chapter we observed Esther's great act of bravery when she went in before the king with the attitude, if I perish, I perish. For her unsummoned appearance there was but one law, that she be executed. But as it is that the heart of the king was in the hands of the LORD to turn it wherever He wants then when the king saw her she found favor in his sight and he extended to her the golden scepter, preserving her life. Upon offering her up to half of his kingdom she requested the king and Haman attend a banquet she had prepared. At the banquet she intended to gather intelligence so she might weigh her probability of success in accusing Haman of plotting evil against her and her people. When the king offered her up to half of his kingdom again she was not convinced she could level the accusation successfully and so she chanced having a second banquet for the king and Haman the next day. In the meantime Haman, blinded by his sin, went out glad and pleased but

when Mordecai didn't honor him at the king's gate he was once more filled with anger. Haman was a man who had everything; riches, power, ten sons, unique privileges with the queen and yet all of this didn't satisfy him because the flesh can never be satisfied and the one thing he lacked was Mordecai's honor. And so his wife and friends suggested that he have an impalement stake built and Mordecai hanged on it so that he could go to the banquet joyfully. And this advice pleased Haman and so he had the impaling stake built.

So coming in to Esther 6 we have the night and day in between Esther's first and second banquet. It appears that things could not get any worse at this point. Esther has not revealed Haman's evil plot against her and her people to the king and Haman has built an impalement stake upon which he plans to execute Mordecai the next day. There is hardly any time for anything to change the course of history.

And yet Esther 6 begins with a very strange incident that occurred during the night. This event is located at the center of a chiastic arrangement of the book's contents.ⁱⁱ

- A** The stage set (1)
- B** The king's decree to destroy the Jews (2–3)
- C** Haman's plot to gain ascendance over Mordecai (4–5)
- D** The night the king could not sleep (6:1)
- C'** Mordecai's ascendance over Haman (6–7)
- B'** The king's decree to deliver the Jews (8–9)
- A'** The stage closed (10)

In chapter 1 the stage was set; in chapters 2-3 the decree was issued to destroy the Jews. In chapters 4-5 Haman plotted to gain ascendance over Mordecai but in chapter 6:1 the king could not sleep and had the royal chronicles read to him which resulted in the discovery of information about Mordecai that began to reverse the events thus far. In chapters 6-7 Mordecai gains ascendance over Haman. In chapters 8-9 the king issues a decree to allowing the Jews to defend themselves, and finally in chapter 10 the stage is closed. Since the center of the chiasm is the night in which the king could not sleep then this event is the pivotal event in the book. All that has come before

is the human design to destroy the Jews, all that comes after is the divine design to deliver the Jews.

Starting in verse 1, **During that night the king could not sleep...** Why couldn't he sleep? He had drunk wine at the banquet. Perhaps he drank too much wine. You'd think that would make him tired! But he couldn't sleep. Was he thinking about what Esther might request? We don't know what human causes may have been involved but we are to perceive that ultimately God's providential "behind the scenes" stole sleep away from him on this most crucial night. **So he gave an order to bring the book of the records, the chronicles, and they were read before the king. 2 It was found written what Mordecai had reported concerning Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who were doorkeepers, that they had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus.** Now not only could he not find sleep that night but in order to go to sleep what better book to have read to you than the equivalent of the congressional record. He had probably had them read to him on other occasions when he could not sleep. But this night they did not put him to sleep. The Hebrew indicates they were read to him all night long. And as they were read, simply by happenstance the record of what **Mordecai had reported concerning Bigthana and Teresh** who had plotted to assassinate the king was read. If you recall the end of chapter 2 where this event occurred and how the plot was investigated and found out to be true and how both these eunuchs were impaled upon an impaling stake and how it was written in the congressional records. Now those records of all records were read. And mind you there were thousands of books in the royal library and the one chosen by the royal librarian was the very one that contained the record of Mordecai's loyalty to the king. Is this simply by chance or providence? And then in the course of reading the very page containing the record of Mordecai's loyalty was read. Was this just happenstance, mere coincidence or providence? And was it mere accident that this all occurred on the very night in between Esther's two banquets?

Is all this just minor details? Or are what we consider minor details often the very pivots upon which history turns? Of course we are in no position to know whether what we might consider a minor detail is really minor or not. We are far too limited and we should not worry significantly about them either. However, we should remain cognizant of the fact that God does know and God often does use what we might consider a minor detail to change all of

history henceforth. In hindsight the author of Esther recognized that the facts of the king's insomnia, the choice of reading the congressional records and the reading of the very pages containing Mordecai's loyalty all on the night in between Esther's two banquets were providentially designed down to the nth detail. In fact it is the fact that God is sovereign down to the nth detail is what impresses us most about Him. He knows how many hairs are on your head, not even a sparrow falls to the ground that He does not know about, He carries the wind where it blows, He tells the ocean go thus far and no further. God's knowledge of and concern for the details shows us that He cares even for the details of our lives. There is no aspect of our lives that is not significant to Him. He cares for you and is watching over you.

So as the king lay in his bed, the congressional records being read he **said**, verse 3, **"What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" Then the king's servants who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him."** It was a strike against the king's character that nothing had been done because Persian kings considered it a point of honor to quickly reward a loyal subject. Since nothing had been done something must be done. It had been almost five years. And yet even this oversight; was it mere fortuity or divine design? Had God created a crucial piece of the puzzle and had it lost for five years only to be discovered on the very night before Esther's second banquet? It's impact would only be felt on this one night, not the night before and not the night after, but this one night. One night later and Mordecai would have been dead, one night earlier and Haman would have cancelled his plan to hang Mordecai. But on this one night this information had the dramatic effect of turning everything that was in Haman's favor against Haman and in favor of Mordecai. Verse 3 therefore becomes the grand pivot upon which everything in the book turns.

Now in verse 4 the morning has come, the king has taken his seat on his royal throne in order to attend to kingdom business. The first business at hand is to correct his majesty's oversight and reward Mordecai. And who just happens to enter the court to carry out this reward but Haman. **So the king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace in order to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows which he had prepared for him.** Is Haman's entrance at this time mere coincidence or divine design? The story has divine providence written all over it. And perhaps there is no finer example in

Scripture of the proverb, **“The mind of man plans his ways, But the Lord directs his steps”** (Prov 16:9). Haman planned to execute Mordecai but the Lord directed his steps to enter the king’s court at the exact time the king was looking for a fitting official to reward Mordecai. The passage has divine irony written all over it. All night long Haman had been having an impaling stake 75 feet tall built for Mordecai, but during that same night the king could not sleep and had the royal records read which reported Mordecai’s loyalty to the king which had gone unrewarded; and before Haman could reveal his desire to execute Mordecai, the king revealed his desire to reward him.

Verse 6, **So Haman came in and the king said to him, “What is to be done for the man whom the king desires to honor?”** This is picture perfect; it couldn’t be more picture perfect. **And Haman said to himself,** this was silent, **“Whom would the king desire to honor more than me?”** What’s going on here? What did we learn about Haman last chapter? Haman was all about Haman. He was arrogant, he was prideful and what does the Scripture say about pride? “Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling.” Haman is about to stumble into a providentially laid trap. He’s walking headlong into destruction and he doesn’t even know it. He’s thinking about Haman and how great Haman is and how there could be no one else the king would **desire to honor more than** himself.

So what does he do in verse 7? He lays out what he wished to be done for himself. And the fact he was able to go through the list so quickly shows you that he had imagined this many, many times before. Haman was just waiting for the day the king would ask!

So verse 7, **Then Haman said to the king, “For the man whom the king desires to honor, 8let them bring a royal robe which the king has worn, and the horse on which the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown has been placed; 9and let the robe and the horse be handed over to one of the king’s most noble princes and let them array the man whom the king desires to honor and lead him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him, ‘Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor.’”** What did Haman want? Haman wanted to be confused with the king. Haman wanted people to look upon him as if he was the king. To accomplish this he suggests

the he be given a **royal robe** that **the king** had **worn** and a **horse** that **the king** had **ridden** and that the horse wear a **royal crown** and one of the king's most noble princes dress him and lead him **through the city on horseback**. Haman wanted to look like the king and be treated like the king.

But at the beginning of verse 9, observe what Haman unwittingly walks into...**and let the robe and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble princes...**Who was the king's **most noble prince**? Who have we learned was exalted above even the seven noblest princes? Haman himself. There was no one nobler a prince than Haman. Thereby Haman was unwittingly invoking himself as the one to carry out the king's desires for the man. And of course he had no clue that the man was Mordecai the Jew, that Jew. So in an ironic turn of events we see that Haman is going to propose that he himself carry out this honor for Mordecai. And end of verse 9, let him **proclaim before him** the only words that would differ the rider from being the king himself, namely, **'Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor.'** Which in Haman's mind could be no one other than himself.

So verse 10, all of the honor Haman imagined the king would bestow on him he must now bestow on Mordecai. **Then the king said to Haman, "Take quickly the robes and the horse as you have said, and do so for Mordecai the Jew, who is sitting at the king's gate; do not fall short in anything of all that you have said."** Now there are two things here to observe. First, the king knew that Mordecai was a Jew. Probably it was recorded in the congressional records that had been read the night before because Persian kings would always have written down the person's name, their father's name and their home town. But strikingly, he apparently was not aware that the decree to destroy a certain people in his kingdom were Mordecai's people, the Jews. And it just shows you how detached the king was from the affairs of his kingdom. He didn't know the Jews were going to be destroyed, he just knew that Haman said there was some offshoot group that didn't want to obey the king's laws and this was not beneficial to the king so we ought to remove them from the kingdom. The king said, great, do whatever you want. And yet all of this too was providentially designed for the great revelation to come in chapter 7.

Second, with the command of verse 10 you can only imagine how Haman felt. This must have completely demoralized him. He couldn't imagine the king wanting to honor anyone more than himself. And least of all his arch-enemy Mordecai. How could this be happening? It must have seemed an incredible turn of events that defied any earthly explanation. But, nevertheless, under the king's command, verse 11, **Haman took the robe and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and led him on horseback through the city square, and proclaimed before him,** words that must have hurt to even utter, **"Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor."** The one guy who bothered Haman was the one guy he had to honor.

So verse 12, **Then Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman hurried home, mourning, and with his head covered.** The guy was literally broken, he had everything going for him except Mordecai and he'd planned to take care of him that day before the banquet but now he had to do the unthinkable act of honoring Mordecai. So he's in **mourning** whereas before it had been Mordecai in mourning. God is turning the tables of history because of what principle? What's the principle behind this reversal of fortunes? Gen 12:3, "I will bless those who bless you and I will curse those who curse you." Haman cursed Mordecai so Haman is being cursed and Mordecai is being blessed.

Verse 13, **Haman recounted to Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him.** This time it's no big bragimony session, the plan they had suggested had backfired terribly. So **his wise men and Zeresh his wife said to him, If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish origin, you will not overcome him, but will surely fall before him."** In other words, even they see the divine irony in the situation; this turn of events they recognize can't be explained by just bad luck. It's one of those remarkable moments in history when the work of God on behalf of the people of God is so obvious that even His enemies can't deny His involvement. Put in the language of Daniel, they can read the handwriting on the wall so they tell him, you're doomed Haman, if you can't succeed in destroying Mordecai then you can't succeed in anything, you are rushing headlong into destruction..

Verse 14, **While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and hastily brought Haman to the banquet which Esther had**

prepared. No doubt he did not go joyfully as he had planned. The impaling stake had been built but Mordecai had not been impaled upon it. Yet he had an important appointment to keep so he is taken **to the banquet...Esther had prepared.**

We come to Esther 7, and recall at this time that Esther had never revealed her Jewish identity to the king. Mordecai had instructed her years ago to conceal her Jewishness. So neither Haman nor the king knew she was a Jew and once again this was divine providence. God was using their human actions to affect His plans for His people. Observe verse 1, **Now the king and Haman came to drink wine with Esther the queen. 2And the king said to Esther on the second day also as they drank their wine at the banquet, “What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom it shall be done.”** Now I don’t know how this banquet went but I imagine that Haman was pretty quiet. He’s probably still reeling from the event of leading Mordecai around on the king’s horse. Esther may or may not know what has happened to Mordecai, she may well know and if she does know then this has boosted her confidence that indeed God has raised her up to royalty for this very time, to deliver her people. And the king for the third time makes his most beneficent offer, up **to half of the kingdom**, he will grant her a very large request.

Now at this time I would say she is confident in getting a conviction. So verse 3, **Then Queen Esther replied, “If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king,** because ultimately the ball is in the king’s court, but her petition is **let my life be given me...and my people as my request; 4for we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed and to be annihilated.** Now does the king know why her life is in danger or even who her people are? No, and that’s part of the drama that’s building. Neither does Haman by the way, he’s clueless what she’s talking about. They’re having wine, they’re talking, suddenly she brings up that her and her people have been sold to destruction? It’s unthinkable to Haman that she’s a Jew. This wasn’t even on his radar; he’s probably sitting over there moping because of Mordecai. So when this came out the king and Haman were completely blindsided. Then in the middle of verse 4 she adds another argument. **Now if we had only been sold as slaves, men and women, I would have remained silent, for the trouble would not be**

commensurate with the annoyance to the king.” It’s a difficult saying in the original Hebrew. Literally it says, “I would have remained silent, for the enemy could not compensate for the loss.” And what that means is that economically speaking it would have benefited the king if our people served as slaves, but as it is, since our people are to be annihilated then it’s not a benefit to the king. Economically it will be a loss.

Verse 5, **Then King Ahasuerus asked Queen Esther, “Who is he, and where is he, who would presume to do thus?”** Who is he and where is he? I want his name and his location. It’s obvious the king is angry that anyone would presume to bring economic loss to his kingdom. So verse 6, **Esther said, “A foe and an enemy is this wicked Haman!” Then Haman became terrified before the king and queen.** In effect she has pitted Haman against the king and the queen so that he is at odds with both of them. And the guilty expression she had hoped for on Haman’s face was immediately apparent. At that moment everything came together in the king’s mind. Haman must have been shocked that the queen herself was a Jew. How could this possibly be? But it is to be and he **became terrified before the king.**

Verse 7, **The king arose in his anger from drinking wine and went into the palace garden;** not an uncommon gesture for someone who’s angry, to stride out of the room to try and collect his thoughts. But this temporary departure was also providential. In the meantime, **Haman** took the opportunity to **beg for his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that harm had been determined against him by the king.** So now he has not only had to honor the Jew Mordecai but he is begging for his life from the Jew Esther. A marvelous turn of events. Those who curse the Jews will be cursed and ultimately the Jews will be blessed. Amplify this turn of events to the future time when the Messiah comes in His kingdom. The nations who have cursed the Jews will be cursed and the Jews will be greatly blessed. We see this pattern recapitulated and magnified at the Second Advent.

Verse 8, **Now when the king returned from the palace garden into the place where they were drinking wine, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was. Then the king said, “Will he even assault the queen with me in the house?”** The Hebrew for **assault** means “to rape.” Adding insult to injury, Haman who was really begging for his life at

the foot of a Jewess appeared to be trying to rape the queen with the king in the same house. This was enough to seal Haman's fate and **As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.** Irony again in the fact that what might have happened to Esther when she went in before the king unsummoned was now happening to Haman.

Verse 9, more irony, **Then Harbonah, one of the eunuchs who were before the king said, "Behold indeed, the gallows standing at Haman's house fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai who spoke good on behalf of the king!" And the king said, "Hang him on it."** Clearly the king did not know until this moment that Haman had intended to impale his loyal savior Mordecai on the impaling stake. Fittingly the king turns the tables once more and orders Haman to be impaled upon it.

Verse 10, **So they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai, and the king's anger subsided.** Thus ended the life of one of the most hostile anti-Semites in the history of the world. And so it will be for all anti-Semites. Gen 12:3 stands, "the one who curses you, I will curse." God providentially through the lives, decisions and actions of Esther and Mordecai delivered.

In conclusion what lessons can we learn? First, that God's providential rule of history is an accumulation of details that all lead to one purpose. The deposing of Vashti nine years before to clear the way for Esther, the selection of Esther to fill the office of queen six years before, the oversight five years before of Mordecai's loyalty to the king, the establishment of Haman as second only to the king, the favor of the king toward Esther when she entered unsummoned, the silence of Esther at the first banquet, the sleepless night of the king, the reading of the royal chronicles, the reading of Mordecai's loyal act, the building of the impaling stake by Haman, all these things and more were working together for one moment in time, one purpose, the disposal of one of the world's most vitriolic Jew haters. God's behind the scenes work involves a number of details all leading to one decisive moment. How impressed we must be with the way God controls history. Second, that God's providential rule of history includes the ways unbelievers think, decide and act. Haman, the king and several events in the lives of the palace eunuchs were being providentially ordered in order to bring about God's deliverance for His people. Unbeknownst to them but detected by some of them, God was

at work behind the scenes in unbelievers lives to bring about His purposes for His people which can never be thwarted. Third, the divine irony at work in history. The night Haman was having the impaling stake built for Mordecai was the very night the king could not sleep and decided to reward Mordecai. The refusal of Mordecai to bow at the feet of Haman was radically reversed when Haman bowed at the feet of Esther. The impaling stake Haman built for Mordecai became the very stake Haman was impaled upon. These and many other ironies present history as ironic. Those who seem to have the upper hand, namely paganism and unbelief, will not have the final say. There is a reversal of fortunes coming and we don't ever want to forget that because when we do we can get depressed. But there is hope, the certain ironic reversal of the people of Satan and the people of God Finally, an important thing to take home is that God loves His own and He keeps His own even when they don't love Him. Esther and Mordecai recognized some things about God's providence and God's promises to Abraham but even the Pharisees recognized the same things and they were not godly. But nevertheless God promised the nation Israel eternal security and therefore God will never cast them off. By application God promises individual believers eternal security and He will never cast us off. He loves us so much that He does whatever it takes to protect us and bring us to our final destiny, to be conformed to the image of Christ in resurrection. And with that in mind, have a good Friday and a wonderful resurrection Sunday, Christ has conquered death, He is risen forevermore!

ⁱ <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1058&context=classicsfacpub>

ⁱⁱ Constable, T. (2003). *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Ne 13:30). Galaxie Software. Andy Woods, *Esther Argument*.

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