

ESTHER

Chapter 5

Esther's Request to the King

On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance.² When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.³ Then the king asked, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you."⁴ "If it pleases the king," replied Esther, "let the king, together with Haman, come today to a banquet I have prepared for him."⁵ "Bring Haman at once," the king said, "so that we may do what Esther asks." So the king and Haman went to the banquet Esther had prepared.⁶ As they were drinking wine, the king again asked Esther, "Now what is your petition? It will be given you. And what is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted."⁷ Esther replied, "My petition and my request is this:⁸ If the king regards me with favor and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for them. Then I will answer the king's question."

5:1 *On the third day.* After the three-day fast (4:16). (TLSB)

Put in her royal robes. Esther stood, dressed in royal robes, where the king could see her. (TLSB)

After she had prepared herself spiritually with fasting and prayer, Esther prepared herself physically for her encounter with the king. (PBC)

STOOD IN THE INNER COURT OF THE PALACE – We do not have much information about the arrangement of the king's private living quarters or his state reception rooms, but it appears that Esther approached the king in some sort of state reception area which was normally off-limits to her. (PBC)

5:2 See Pr 21:1. (CSB)

held out to Esther the golden scepter. At this tense moment, the king, by extending his scepter, indicated that he was willing to hear what Esther had to say (4:11). Herodotus characterized Ahasuerus as a man easily swayed by feminine beauty. (TLSB)

touched the tip of the scepter. Sign of gratitude and respect. (TLSB)

5:3 UP TP HALF THE KINGDOM – This promise reminds us of one made by King Herod to a dancing girl. She asked for the head of John the Baptist. (PBC)

Hyperbole. Ahasuerus extravagantly offered Esther virtually anything she wanted. He repeats this offer in v 6 and 7:2. An identical offer was made by Herod Antipas to Salome (Mk 6:23). (TLSB)

5:4 *king and Haman come today to a feast.* Esther’s modest request shows that she has carefully thought about the best way to accomplish her ultimate purpose. In the ancient Near East, one never made the major request right away but paved the way with minor entreaties. (TLSB)

5:5 *came to the feast.* Sixth feast reported in Esther. (TLSB)

5:6–7† One can only speculate regarding Esther’s reasons for delaying her answer to the king’s question until he had asked it a third time (vv. 3, 6; 7:2). The author may use these delays as plot retardation devices that sustain the tension and permit the introduction of new material on Haman’s self-aggrandizement (vv. 11–12) and Mordecai’s reward (6:6–11). (CSB)

5:6 *drinking wine.* Ahasuerus would have been in a mellow mood after the meal, seemingly a good time for Esther to beg his mercy for the Judeans. Her delay builds tension for the reader and allows other events to take place. (TLSB)

5:8 *come to the feast ... tomorrow.* By requesting attendance at yet another banquet, Esther piqued the king’s curiosity and aroused Haman’s short-lived arrogance (v 12). (TLSB)

She may have had a good reason for thinking that another occasion would offer a better chance of success or she may simply have lost her nerve. When we look ahead in the story we realize that regardless of what Esther’s motive may have been, the delay was a result of God’s providence. This delay was necessary so that the events recorded in the next two sections of our text could take place and prepare the way for Haman’s downfall. (PBC)

5:1–8 Esther does not make her intentions known immediately, but waits for exactly the right time. Ultimately, it is God who inspires Esther’s delay in order to give Haman more rope with which to hang himself. We are often impatient, eager to hurry things along. When God seems to act too slowly on our behalf, we may still trust His wisdom and continue to pray with confidence, “Your good and gracious will be done.” • Loving Father, give me patience to wait in hope for Your saving help. Amen. (TLSB)

Haman’s Rage Against Mordecai

9 Haman went out that day happy and in high spirits. But when he saw Mordecai at the king's gate and observed that he neither rose nor showed fear in his presence, he was filled with rage against Mordecai. ¹⁰ Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home. Calling together his friends and Zeresh, his wife, ¹¹ Haman boasted to them about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king had honored him and how he had elevated him above the other nobles and officials. ¹² "And that's not all," Haman added. "I'm the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave. And she has invited me along with the king tomorrow. ¹³ But all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate." ¹⁴ His wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Have a gallows built, seventy-five feet^a high, and ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai hanged on it. Then go with the king to the dinner and be happy." This suggestion delighted Haman, and he had the gallows built.

5:9 *Haman ... joyful and glad of heart.* Esther's banquet had its desired effect on this enemy of the Judeans. (TLSB)

neither rose nor trembled. Mordecai escalated his civil disobedience by failing to rise before Haman, filling him with greater wrath. (TLSB)

Haman's rage is kindled when Mordecai does not rise in his presence—an ironic contrast to his earlier refusal to bow (3:2–6). (CSB)

5:10 *Haman restrained himself and went home.* Previously, Haman had "disdained to lay hands on Mordecai" (3:6). Perhaps this is a sign of personal cowardice. (TLSB)

5:11–12 With his wife and friends as the audience, Haman enumerated his many achievements and honors. These included the opportunity to dine twice with the king and queen within 24 hours. Obviously, Haman was totally unaware of Esther's national origin. (TLSB)

5:11 *many sons.* Haman had ten sons (9:7–10). Herodotus (1.136) reports that the Persians prized a large number of sons second only to valor in battle; the Persian king sent gifts to the subject with the most sons (cf. Ps 127:3–5). (CSB)

5:12–13 See Pr 16:18; 29:23. (CSB)

5:13 *worth nothing to me.* Haman's obsessive hatred of Mordecai had become irrational. (TLSB)

5:14 *seventy-five feet high.* There may be a note of hyperbole in the height of the gallows. Others have suggested that the gallows was erected atop some other structure to achieve this height, e.g., the city wall (see 1Sa 31:10). (CSB)

Gallows are 75 ft, the height of a six-story building. The height illustrated Haman's wrath. (TLSB)

hanged. See note on 2:23. (CSB)

Irony. Haman's wife and friends suggested that he first erect the gallows and then tell the king what to do. Their plan would misfire badly. (TLSB)

5:9–14 “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Pr 16:18). These words warn us not to walk in the footsteps of Haman. God humbles those who glorify themselves. Outwardly, Haman has everything going for him, but because of his rage, he cannot enjoy what he has. In striking contrast to Haman is Christ Jesus, who “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,” but humbled Himself for our salvation (Php 2:6–8). • O Holy Spirit, destroy in me all sinful pride, and lead me to kneel humbly in faith before the cross of Jesus, my Savior. Amen. (TLSB)