

ESTHER

Chapter 5

Esther Prepares a Banquet

On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, in front of the king's quarters, while the king was sitting on his royal throne inside the throne room opposite the entrance to the palace. 2 And when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won favor in his sight, and he held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter. 3 And the king said to her, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom." 4 And Esther said, "If it please the king, let the king and Haman come today to a feast that I have prepared for the king." 5 Then the king said, "Bring Haman quickly, so that we may do as Esther has asked." So the king and Haman came to the feast that Esther had prepared. 6 And as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king said to Esther, "What is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled." 7 Then Esther answered, "My wish and my request is: 8 If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my wish and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come to the feast that I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said."

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 king's 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 *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 to half of my 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 Plans to Hang Mordecai

9 And Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he neither rose nor trembled before him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai. **10** Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and brought his friends and his wife Zeresh. **11** And Haman recounted to them the splendor of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honored him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and the servants of the king. **12** Then Haman said, "Even Queen Esther let no one but me come with the king to the feast she prepared. And tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king. **13** Yet all this is worth nothing to me, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." **14** Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Let a gallows fifty cubits high be made, and in the morning tell the king to have Mordecai hanged upon it. Then go joyfully with the king to the feast." This idea pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made.

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 *number of his 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)

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

5:14 *fifty cubits high (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. 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)