

Listen for Him

Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22 (September 26, 2021)

Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22

7So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. 2On the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, “What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.” 3Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have won your favor, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me—that is my petition—and the lives of my people—that is my request. 4For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king.” 5Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, “Who is he, and where is he, who has presumed to do this?” 6Esther said, “A foe and enemy, this wicked Haman!” Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.

9Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, “Look, the very gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, stands at Haman’s house, fifty cubits high.” And the king said, “Hang him on that.” 10So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the anger of the king abated.

20Mordecai recorded these things, and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, 21enjoining them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same month, year by year, 22as the days on which the Jews gained relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor

Historical Context

The humor of the book of Esther is reflected in Purim celebrations (the annual Jewish festival that commemorates the story of Esther). At Purim, participants dress up in costumes, put on Purim shpiels (humorous plays), and generally have a raucous celebration. When the name of Haman comes up in the reading of the scroll of Esther, it is drowned out by booing and noisemakers. When the names of Esther or Mordecai are read, they are cheered. There is even an ancient tradition from the Talmud instructing Purim celebrants to drink until they are “unable to differentiate between the phrases ‘bless Mordecai’ and ‘curse Haman’”

Theme: Listen for Him

God is never mentioned in the book of Esther. God does not speak or act in the story. There are no burning bushes here; no miracle by the sea. And yet, by the end of the book, God’s people are saved and their enemies are defeated. Thus, it is important to discern God’s will and action in the everyday realities of life. We may wish for God’s direct intervention, for a burning bush or an obvious miracle, but most days we (like Esther) don’t get such things. Indeed, most of the time, God is subtle to a fault. And yet, if we have the eyes to see and the ears to hear, we may be able to discern where God is acting in our lives.

Frederick Buechner writes: “The question is not whether the things that happen to you are chance things or God’s things because, of course, they are both at once. There is no chance thing

through which God cannot speak ... He speaks. He says he is with us on our journeys. He says he has been with us since each of our journeys began. Listen for him.”