

An Executed Scoundrel

Councilman Thompson, you are on the agenda to share a concern,” said Mayor Schneider at the council’s executive session.

Roberta was one of seven council members in a city of 21,500 people. The population’s racial composition was 26 percent black, 70 percent white, 2 percent Hispanic and 2 percent Asian.

Roberta was the first and only African American on the board. She had run for office a little more than a year ago. Roberta wanted to help govern in the town where she was raised, and the 30-year-old Christian woman was encouraged by others because of her moral character, intelligence, drive, and fierce sense of justice.

Roberta received numerous concerns, but the overwhelming complaint was unfair ticketing practices by the police. African Americans were receiving 98 percent of all motor vehicle violations.

Roberta had spoken with the town’s police chief, police officers, and municipal judge to gain more insight. She had received minimal explanations.

“They speed. They break the law,” was the curt response from the police chief.

“I have been inundated with calls and complaints that black people are profiled by our police at an alarming rate. Traffic violators receive hefty fines, and the city’s budget is being built on the backs of those who can least afford it,” Roberta told the council. “This is not right. I’d like for this council to form a Citizens Police Review Board, made up of 50 percent black residents and 50 percent white.”

- 1.** *In your own words, define the word “injustice.”*
- 2.** *What is happening in the world that you would perceive as being unjust?*
- 3.** *Why is it often unpopular to speak out against injustice?*

LESSON FOCUS: Be courageous! Speak out against injustice.

The Preparation of a Second Banquet

Esther 7:1-2, KJV

1 So the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen.

2 And the king said again unto Esther on the second day at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition, queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? and it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom.

Esther 7:1-2, NIV

¹So the king and Haman went to Queen Esther's banquet, ²and as they were drinking wine on the second day, the king again asked, "Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted."

Toward the end of the Book of Esther, we read of the final events involving Esther and her cousin, Mordecai, in the time of the Persian Empire. In the previous chapters, King Xerxes (ZURK-seez) or Ahasuerus [KJV: ah-haz-you-EER-uhs] promoted an official named Haman to second in command in the empire and required every official to pay homage to him. Mordecai, however, refused to do so. This enraged Haman, who then devised a plan to exterminate all the Jews living throughout the empire.

Mordecai urged Esther to use her position of power and influence as queen to help her people fight for survival (4:14). Despite the queen's fears of approaching the king, which could cost the queen her life, she invited the king and Haman to a formal banquet. Also about this time, the king used Haman to honor Mordecai for previously exposing a plot to assassinate Xerxes, which enraged Haman (Esth. 6).

The narrative in 7:1 describes the king and his second-in-command arriving at Queen Esther's "banquet," where she would make a "request" (vs. 2) to him. At the end of the multicourse meal of sumptuous food and drink, the attendees would drink wine, which created a more relaxed atmosphere. Xerxes then extended to Esther the opportunity to make her request, a request for as much as "half the kingdom." Esther was now in a position to truly save her people.

4. How did the Persian king begin Queen Esther's banquet?

The Jewish Identity of Esther

Esther 7:3-7, KJV

3 Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request:

4 For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage.

5 Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?

6 And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.

7 And the king arising from the banquet of wine in his wrath went into the palace garden: and Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen; for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king.

Esther 7:3-7, NIV

³Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request. ⁴For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king."

⁵King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, "Who is he? Where is he—the man who has dared to do such a thing?"

⁶Esther said, "An adversary and enemy! This vile Haman!"

Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen.

⁷The king got up in a rage, left his wine and went out into the palace garden. But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life.

At first, Esther remained extremely deferential in voicing her "petition" (7:3). Nonetheless, the queen sensed the time had come for her to put forward her "request." She asked Xerxes to "spare" the lives of his queen and her "people."

Evidently, the king's body language signaled to Esther that Xerxes was unaware of the threat implicit in the queen's

statement. So, she explained that she and her fellow Jews had been “sold” (vs. 4) to be murdered by their archfoe. Esther noted that she would not have annoyed the king with the less weighty outcome of the Jews being “sold” as “slaves” (vs. 4). Esther carefully worded her accusation to ensure that she did not implicate Xerxes in the plot to massacre the Jews. But his attention became riveted on finding the scoundrel who threatened the lives of the queen and her people.

Esther directed the king’s attention to Haman. The queen had used three terms to describe the menace facing her and her Jewish peers: “destroyed,” “killed” and “annihilated.” Esther then used three other terms to describe Haman. He was not only an “adversary” and an “enemy,” but also “vile.”

The king was so consumed with anger that he promptly abandoned his goblet of “wine” (vs. 7) and retreated to the “garden” (which was next to the royal palace: 1:5-6), perhaps to regain his composure. Haman made the fatal mistake of not leaving right after the king’s departure, especially since only eunuchs could remain in the presence of a member of the king’s harem.

Haman instinctively realized that Xerxes would order him to be executed. A few moments earlier, Esther made a plea for her life to the king. Now, the would-be annihilator of the Jews found himself begging a Jew to spare his life.

5. What request did Esther make to Xerxes?

6. What reason did Esther offer to Xerxes concerning the queen’s request?

7. How did Haman respond to Esther’s accusation?

The King’s Decree to Execute Haman

Esther 7:8-10, KJV

8 Then the king returned out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine; and Haman was fallen upon the bed whereon Esther was. Then

Esther 7:8-10, NIV

⁸Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining. The king exclaimed, “Will he

KJV

said the king, Will he force the queen also before me in the house? As the word went out of king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.

9 And Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, said before the king, Behold also, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who spoken good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman. Then the king said, Hang him thereon.

10 So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified.

NIV

even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?"

As soon as the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. ⁹Then Harbonah, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said, "A pole reaching to a height of fifty cubits stands by Haman's house. He had it set up for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king."

The king said, "Impale him on it!" ¹⁰So they impaled Haman on the pole he had set up for Mordecai. Then the king's fury subsided.

When Xerxes reentered the hall, he saw Haman dropping on his knees where Esther was lounging. Xerxes accused Haman of intending to sexually violate the queen while with the king in their royal residence. Such action was regarded as an attempt to usurp the throne. As if to signal Haman's disgrace, the attendants put a cloth over his "face" (see 6:12).

Harbonah is one of seven "eunuchs" (7:9; see 1:10) who served in the king's presence. Harbonah noted that recently Haman arranged for a 75-foot pole to be built on his property for the purpose of impaling Mordecai. Harbonah reminded the king that Mordecai previously thwarted a plot against the emperor, in which two conspirators had been impaled on sharpened poles. Xerxes directed that Haman be publicly executed on the "pole" (vs. 9) he intended for executing Mordecai. Even though God is not explicitly mentioned in the book, the twists and turns of the story make it clear that He is always—even if invisibly—present with His people to guide and protect them. Despite a powerful enemy, God preserved His people.

8. *What did the king see when he rejoined Esther?*

9. *What decision did Xerxes make concerning Haman?*

Never Fail to Speak Out!

“There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice,” Elie Wiesel said, “but there must never be a time when we fail to protest.” Wiesel was a Holocaust survivor, a victim of one of the worst injustices ever executed upon humanity. He survived as a prisoner in two concentration camps.

Wiesel did not remain silent about his experiences, but he spoke out as a writer and professor. In fact, because of his political and social activities, he aided in the creation of the United States Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., and one of his books has become an international classic, *Night*, which helped him be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986.

Nevertheless, Wiesel would have spoken out even had he never received any acclaim for his tireless campaign against oppression throughout the world. Although Wiesel did not become a Christian, his life and his words can still inspire us to be beacons of God’s justice in a world full of thriving injustices.

We do not need to have suffered at the hands of injustice in order to recognize it, be appalled by it, and speak out against it. We need only know that our Lord is intolerant of such evil and has commanded us to be vessels of His righteousness. It is not enough merely to be righteous, but our righteousness should be one barrier against the spread of injustice as we stand against its evil. We know it’s not always safe to speak out against injustice. In fact, we are often in a situation in which we must move out of our comfort zone and place ourselves in the presence of injustice. It is then we need the Spirit to guide and strengthen us to have the courage to be His messenger. “Stand firm then,” said Paul, “with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place” (Eph. 6:14).

10. *Why can it be a problem to resist injustice with violence?*

11. *In what ways can you express your opposition to injustice?*

12. *How does the Lord give you the courage to speak out against injustice?*

Pledge to Right Wrongs

When the Jews were being persecuted throughout the Persian Empire, Queen Esther courageously petitioned on behalf of her people before King Xerxes. Because she was bold and respectful before the king, her suit was successful. We may not succeed as well as Esther did. Nevertheless, we should never passively allow injustice to flourish without it being confronted.

► *First, write “I Will Speak Out Against Injustice” at the top of an index card. Next, write the days of the week on the far left in a column. As the days of the week pass, at the end of each day briefly describe how you fulfilled this pledge, as well as describing what success you might have had.*

KEY VERSE

For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? —Esther 4:14, KJV

“For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?” —Esther 4:14, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK’S LESSON

Week of April 20 through April 26

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** 1 Kings 3:16-28—Solomon Makes a Just Decision.
- Tues.** Luke 4:14-21—Jesus Issues His Platform for Justice.
- Wed.** Leviticus 25:8-17—The Year of Jubilee Established.
- Thurs.** Isaiah 49:1-7—A Light to the Nations.
- Fri.** Isaiah 61:1-7—A New Vision for the People.
- Sat.** Isaiah 62:5-12—Zion Welcomes the Redeemed Home.
- Sun.** Isaiah 61:8-11; 62:2-4—The Lord Brings His People Justice.