



SESSION 5

STAND UP AND SPEAK

▶ ***The Point***

Be bold, but leave the results to God.

▶ ***The Passage***

Esther 7:1-10

▶ ***The Bible Meets Life***

Believe it or not, about ten percent of us actually look forward to public speaking. At the other end of the spectrum, about ten percent of us dread it to the point of great anxiety. The eighty percent of us left in the middle would rather not speak in public, but we'll do it if we have to.⁸ It's one thing when you're called on in a meeting to answer a question or give a brief report; we don't have time to get nervous. But if our boss tells us that we must make a major presentation in three weeks, we have plenty of time to think about it—and thinking about it makes us nervous!

That nervousness is greatly multiplied when what we say carries significant consequences. Boldness in speaking does not come easy. Courage to do the right thing in a risky situation does not come easy either. Yet in Esther, we see a woman who did both. Lives were at stake. If she didn't speak and act boldly, thousands could die, but if she acted courageously yet blundered it—well, she could make matters worse.

▶ ***The Setting***

Haman constructed a gallows on which he planned to hang Mordecai. Meanwhile, the king experienced a restless night and requested the daily record book read to him. He learned Mordecai had been instrumental in saving the king from an assassination attempt. Because Mordecai had received no recognition for his act, Ahasuerus commanded Haman to honor this Jew. Following that humbling experience, Haman rushed to the banquet Esther had prepared for the king and him.

What does the Bible say?

Gallows (7:10)—The term literally means “tree” and designates a stake or pole on which the Persians impaled the individuals they executed.

Esther 7:1-10

¹ So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. ² And on the second day, as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king again said to Esther, “What is your wish, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.”

³ Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request. ⁴ For 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 been silent, for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king.”

⁵ Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, “Who is he, and where is he, who has dared to do this?” ⁶ And Esther said, “A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!” Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.

⁷ And the king arose in his wrath from the wine-drinking and went into the palace garden, but Haman stayed to beg for his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that harm was determined against him by the king.

⁸ And the king returned from the palace garden to the place where they were drinking wine, as Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was. And the king said, “Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?” As the word left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman’s face.

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

Esther 7:1-3 Commentary

[Verse 1] In chapter 6, the suspense increases as King Ahasuerus endured a sleepless night. He did what kings did in those days to cure insomnia. Ahasuerus ordered that the book recording daily events in the kingdom to be read to him. God's providential hand designed that the reading included an occasion when Mordecai had saved the king from being assassinated by two of his guards. When Ahasuerus learned nothing had been done to recognize Mordecai for his act, the king asked Haman what should be done for the man the king wanted to honor. Arrogantly assuming the king wanted to honor him, Haman responded that the esteemed individual should receive royal treatment. Imagine Haman's shock when Ahasuerus commanded him to honor Mordecai as Haman had suggested! Haman honored Mordecai as the king commanded. As the chapter ends, the king's servants rushed Haman to the second banquet Esther had prepared. So **the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther.**

[Verses 2-3] Just as he had at the preceding day's banquet, the king again asked Esther to state her request. **As they were drinking wine**, typically served at the end of the meal, Ahasuerus asked to know Esther's petition. At this time Esther voiced her real request. She addressed the king as **"O king."** Esther did not presume upon Ahasuerus's goodwill. Yet she made her appeal direct and to the point. The supreme moment of risk and revelation had come. In petitioning the king for her people's lives, Esther identified herself with them. She pleaded with the king to spare both her life and her people's lives. The two pleas were inseparably linked. Esther's plea to spare her life and her people reveals at least two paradoxes. First, at this moment when Esther appealed for the preservation of her own life, she put herself in greater danger by revealing that she was a Jew. Second, at this moment when the queen obeyed Mordecai to speak on her people's behalf (see Esth. 4:13-14), she also disobeyed his instruction not to make known her ethnicity. (See 2:20.) Ahasuerus must have been stunned and startled at Esther's words. He no doubt wondered why Esther's life was in danger. Nevertheless, Esther proceeded with her heroic response. Part of that response is abrupt in the original Hebrew. Such abrupt language possibly reflects her desperation and her anxiety regarding Ahasuerus's reply to her petition.

Esther 7:4-6 Continued Commentary

[Verse 4] Without pausing to wait for the king to speak, Esther continued her entreaty. She identified her people and herself as having **been sold**. The queen used the passive voice in stating what had happened. She wisely did not implicate the king although Ahasuerus had authorized the Jews' destruction. (See 3:9-11.) Esther piled up words to describe the fate to which she and her people had been assigned—**to be destroyed, to be killed and to be annihilated**. In the original Hebrew language these same three words formed part of Haman's decree recorded in Esther 3:13. Hearing these same words surely triggered a reminder of the decree Haman had crafted. By this point, Ahasuerus must have realized the significance of Esther's speech. The Hebrew term rendered *destroyed* carries the distinction of always appearing in passages that deal with vengeance or with God's judgment. The term normally involves a rather sudden calamity such as war or mass killing. Esther and her people had also been handed over to *be killed*. The Hebrew word root includes the concepts of murder and capital punishment or judicial execution. The third term depicting that to which she and her people have been sold is *to be annihilated*.

Repeating the same three verbs Haman had employed in his decree, Esther subtly called the king's attention to the individual responsible for attempting to destroy her people and her. Furthermore, the threefold repetition of the same thought signaled completeness. Thus the focus falls on Haman's desire to totally exterminate the Jews. Sensitive to the king's power and perspective, Esther tactfully added that if it had simply been a matter of selling her people as slaves rather than destroying them, she would not have bothered Ahasuerus with this matter. She would not have spoken up.

[Verse 5] The king's questions reveal his sense of outrage. The phrase rendered **has dared to do this** is literally translated as "has filled his heart to do so." The heart represented the seat of the will or the center of decision making. Thus when Haman filled his heart to destroy the Jews, he decided to get rid of these people. (See Acts 5:3.) Did Ahasuerus think he had been duped into agreeing to the Jews' destruction? When Haman sought the king's approval on an order to destroy the Jews, he did not mention them by name. Thus the king may have been unaware of the complete contents of the decree he had signed. In any case, the earlier plot on the king's life had been foiled by a Jew—Mordecai. Here the plot on the queen's life was foiled by another Jew—Esther herself.

[Verse 6] Esther replied boldly and succinctly to the king's inquiry: **"A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman."** Esther utilized three words to describe him. *Foe* derives from a Hebrew verb meaning "to show hostility toward." *Enemy* also conveys the concept of hostility. The final word in this trio is the designation *wicked*. It contrasts with "good" and can indicate moral deficiencies that injure oneself or others. Esther made her case clearly and strongly. In taking her stand before Ahasuerus, Esther spoke boldly. In contrast, Haman **was terrified before the king and the queen**. He responded appropriately for Esther had unmasked his evil deed. In announcing Haman as the enemy, Esther also revealed that she was a Jew. Her words sealed Haman's fate. No wonder he felt doomed.



STUDY THE BIBLE

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Esther 7:7-10

⁷ And the king arose in his wrath from the wine-drinking and went into the palace garden, but Haman stayed to beg for his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that harm was determined against him by the king. ⁸ And the king returned from the palace garden to the place where they were drinking wine, as Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was. And the king said, "Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?" As the word left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman's face. ⁹ Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, "Moreover, the gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, is standing at Haman's house, fifty cubits high." And the king said, "Hang him on that." ¹⁰ So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the wrath of the king abated.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Esther 7:7-10 on page 118 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 119 of the PSG: "What are the practical consequences of leaving vengeance in God's hands?"

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from pages 118-119 of the PSG.

- ▶ History records that King Ahasuerus was well-known for his temper. At times, he could be an unstable and vindictive decision-maker.
- ▶ The king had to make a decision nobody else could make for him.
- ▶ King Ahasuerus had a history of rash decisions, but in this moment, he made the right choice. He put this enemy of the people to death, and soon he would empower the Jews to stand against those who sought to harm them.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 119 of the PSG: "Where do we have opportunities to be bold about justice in our community?"

LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item 11**, the "Fight Injustice" poster. As a follow-up to Question #5 ask, "Where is God leading you to stand up to injustice?" Allow time for responses.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

Should Esther have tried to spare Haman's life? Explain.



Esther 7:7-10 Commentary

[Verse 7] It was too late; Haman realized he had made Ahasuerus angry. The Hebrew word rendered **wrath** also portrays Haman's rage toward Mordecai in Esther 5:9. Why did Ahasuerus retreat to the palace garden? The text provides no explanation. When the king departed, Haman saw the handwriting on the wall. He remained with Esther to plead for his life. The tables had turned. Previously Esther the Jew pleaded for her life and her people's lives because of Haman's evil plot. Once his evil deed had been exposed, however, Haman pleaded for his life before Queen Esther. The Hebrew word translated **harm** literally means "evil." In this context it conveys the sense of "calamity" that Ahasuerus was preparing for Haman.

[Verse 8] Ahasuerus returned at the precise moment Haman fell on the **couch** where Esther reclined. Ancient Middle Eastern people reclined on couches at their feasts. Haman probably grabbed Esther's feet and kissed them as he begged for mercy. Ironically, he who had demanded that Mordecai the Jew bow before him was groveling at the feet of Esther the Jew. In Persian custom no men except the king and designated eunuchs were permitted within seven paces of women belonging to the king's harem. Haman's timing couldn't have been worse. As the king entered the room, he interpreted Haman's act as an attempt to violate the queen. Ahasuerus's response sealed Haman's fate. The king's **word** does not refer to his question. The term refers to a judicial decree. The king pronounced the death sentence on Haman. Servants or court officials **covered Haman's face**. The Greeks and Romans covered criminals' faces before leading them away to execution. Although we cannot be certain, that may have been Persian practice as well.

[Verse 9] Harbona, one of the king's seven personal eunuchs (see Esth. 1:10), immediately recalled the **gallows** Haman had constructed for Mordecai. He also remembered that Mordecai's report had saved Ahasuerus's life. Harbona's words effectively served as another charge against Haman. The eunuch's reminder that Haman had plotted the death of a man who had saved the king from an assassination attempt guaranteed Haman's doom. Ahasuerus swiftly replied, "**Hang him on that.**"

[Verse 10] This verse calls to mind the biblical principle that we reap what we sow. (See Prov. 26:27; Gal. 6:7.) The gallows Haman had built for Mordecai became the instrument of his own death. After Haman's hanging, Ahasuerus's **wrath** or rage abated. (See comments on Esth. 7:7.) Esther acted boldly, but it was not within her power to determine the ultimate fate of her enemies. The story of Esther reminds us of the foundational truth that we are to leave vengeance to God. This principle is not a passive one; it is predicated on our first interceding and exposing wrongdoing. Ultimately, justice is in the hands of the Supreme Authority, the Lord Himself: "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'" (Rom. 12:19).



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 120 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications:



Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

- ▶ **Pray.** Ask the Lord to reveal ways you can use what He’s given you—your time, possessions, influence, and position—to speak out against evil and injustice in society.
- ▶ **Look.** Do some research into opportunities in your community to help fight injustice.
- ▶ **Act.** As a group, prayerfully consider what you can do either through your local church or a trusted local organization to help make a difference in the area God is calling you to serve.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 120 of the PSG:

You may not be a skilled public speaker, but all of us have been given a voice that God wants us to use to be salt and light in this world. Be bold, but leave the results to God!

PRAY: Conclude by asking God once more for the courage to be bold in standing against injustice. Thank Him because we can trust Him with the results.

**GROUPS
MATTER.**

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