

Esther 5 — The Extended Sceptre — Esther Approaches the Throne, the Wisdom of the Second Banquet, and the Gallows Pride Builds for Itself

Esther 5: on the third day of the fast Esther risks death by approaching Ahasuerus unbidden; the king extends the golden sceptre and grants her favor, and she answers not with her petition but with an invitation to a banquet, and then a second banquet — while Haman, honored at her table yet enraged by one unbowing Jew, goes home and builds a gallows. Persia under Ahasuerus (Xerxes), Susa the winter capital, c. 473 BC.

Chapter 4 ended on the edge of a cliff, and chapter 5 is Esther stepping off it. Three days of fasting are behind her — she and her maids and every Jew in Susa have gone without bread or water, "night or day" (Esth. 4:16), and now the third day dawns. She has already spoken the sentence that decides everything: "if I perish, I perish." The question the whole book has been building toward is no longer whether she will act, but what happens when she does. In a court where approaching the king unsummoned is a capital offense, a queen is about to walk uninvited into the throne room and put her life on the count of one man's mood.

Hebrew Word Studies

chen (H2580) (חֵן) — **favour, grace, unmerited good will vv. 2, 8.** *Chen* is the word for favor that is given, never owed — the good will that flows from the one who has power toward the one who has none. It is the word running under Esther's whole story: she "obtained *favour* in his sight" (v. 2), and she will frame her second invitation on the same ground — "if I have found *favour* in the sight of the king" (v. 8). She never claims a right; she appeals to grace. It is the same word Noah "found... in the eyes of the LORD" (Gen. 6:8), the first *chen* in scripture, and the word the priestly blessing pours over Israel — "the LORD be gracious (*chanan*, its verb) unto thee" (Num. 6:25). The whole Latter-day understanding of grace lives in this word: "it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do" (2 Ne. 25:23) — after Esther has done all she can (dressed, stood, risked), the sceptre still comes only as gift. Grace is what meets us when we have spent our own strength and can only stand in the court and be seen.

mishteh (H4960) (מִשְׁתֶּה) — **banquet, feast, a drinking-feast vv. 4, 5, 6, 8, 12, 14.** *Mishteh* comes from *shatah*, "to drink" — literally a "drinking," a wine-feast. It is one of the load-bearing words of the whole book: Esther is chosen at Ahasuerus's year-long *mishteh* (Esth. 1–2), the doom of the Jews is decreed while the king sits down to a *mishteh* (3:15), and it is undone across the two *mishteh* of chapters 5 and 7, then memorialized forever in the *mishteh* of Purim (9:17–22). In a book that never once names God, the banquet table is where the decisive turns are made — the closest thing the story has to a sanctuary. Scripture keeps sealing its great reversals at tables: Joseph reveals himself to his brothers over a feast (Gen. 43–45); the Lord promises that in Zion he will "make unto all people a feast" (Isa. 25:6); and the risen Christ makes the sacramental table the center of covenant remembrance — "this do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19; 3 Ne. 18). Esther's two banquets teach the same quiet lesson: providence often ripens not in the dramatic confrontation but around a table, over time, while the patient set the places.

kavod (H3519) (כָּבוֹד) — **glory, honour, weight, abundance v. 11.** *Kavod* comes from the root *kaved*, "to be heavy" — glory is weight, substance, the gravity of a consequential life. Haman parades "the *glory* of his riches" (v. 11), heaping up his own heaviness before an audience. But this is the very word scripture reserves for its holiest reality: the *kavod* of the LORD that filled the tabernacle so that Moses could not enter (Ex. 40:34–35), the "*glory* of the LORD" Isaiah saw fill the temple (Isa. 6). There is a true weight and a counterfeit one, and the difference is the direction it faces. The glory of God is weight received and reflected — "not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory" (Ps. 115:1). Haman's glory is weight hoarded and displayed, and it cannot bear the touch of a single unbowing man. The Doctrine and Covenants gives the true weight its name: "The glory of God is intelligence" (D&C 93:36), a splendor that grows by giving light, not by demanding bows. Haman had heaped up *kavod* and found it "availeth me nothing" — because self-made glory is the lightest thing there is.

'ets (H6086) (עֵץ) — **tree, wood, timber, gallows v. 14.** *Ets* is the ordinary Hebrew word for "tree" or "wood" — the same word as the trees of Eden, "the *tree* of life" and "the *tree* of knowledge" (Gen. 2:9). Here it is the killing tree, the gallows fifty cubits high that Haman raises for Mordecai and that will hang Haman himself (Esth. 7:10). Scripture keeps turning the *ets* into an instrument of reversal: the tree of death in the garden is answered by another *ets* — "cursed is every one that hangeth on a *tree*" (Deut. 21:23), the very verse Paul applies to the crucified Christ, "made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every

one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13). The gallows built by hatred becomes, in the deepest reading of scripture, the shape of the cross where hatred's whole scheme is finally overturned. And Lehi's vision restores the *ets* to its first and truest meaning — the tree of life "whose fruit was desirable to make one happy... the love of God" (1 Ne. 8:10; 11:22). Haman builds a tree of death and dies on it; the Savior hangs on a tree of death and turns it into life. The wood on which pride would destroy becomes the wood by which mercy saves.

From the Chapter's Architecture

The deeper architecture is the timing. Everything that makes chapter 6 possible is quietly laid in chapter 5's second panel. Esther's postponement leaves an empty night; Haman's rage sends him home to build a gallows he will beg to use "to morrow"; and between the two banquets falls the sleepless night in which the king reads his chronicles and remembers Mordecai. The chapter ends with the gallows finished and the trap, from Haman's side, perfectly set — and the reader who knows the ending sees that every piece Haman has moved into place is a piece against himself. Nothing supernatural happens. A queen delays, a proud man builds, a king will fail to sleep. And that is precisely how this book insists God works: not by suspending the ordinary, but by aligning it.