

Esther 7 — The Pit He Dug Himself — Esther Names Her People, the Enemy Is Unmasked, and the Fifty-Cubit Gallows Finds Its Owner

Esther 7: at the second banquet of wine Esther at last discloses her petition — her own life and her people's — and names Haman the adversary; the king rises in wrath, Haman falls begging on the queen's couch, and by Harbonah's word is hanged on the fifty-cubit gallows he built for Mordecai; Persia under Ahasuerus (Xerxes), c. 473 BC.

Two chapters ago Esther risked the golden sceptre and lived; one chapter ago the king lay awake, called for the chronicles, and discovered that Mordecai — the very man Haman came at dawn to have hanged — had once saved the royal life. In a single dizzying morning Haman was made to lead his enemy through the streets crying "Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour" (Esth. 6:11). He went home "mourning, and having his head covered" (Esth. 6:12), and his own wise men told him the sentence hanging over him: "thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him" (Esth. 6:13). The chamberlains arrived to hurry him to Esther's second banquet before the words were out of their mouths.

Hebrew Word Studies

nephesh (H5315) (נֶפֶשׁ) — **soul, life, self, the whole living person vv. 3, 7.** Twice in this chapter everything turns on nephesh.

Esther pleads "let my *life* (nephesh) be given me" (v. 3); a few verses later Haman "stood up to make request for his *life* (nephesh) to Esther the queen" (v. 7). The same word weighs the queen and the enemy on one scale — and the scale tips opposite ways. Nephesh is the word for the whole living self, the breath God breathed into Adam so that "man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7); it is what the law protects when it says "the *life* of the flesh is in the blood" (Lev. 17:11), and what the Psalmist commits when he prays "into thine hand I commit my spirit" — and, elsewhere, "my *soul* is even as a weaned child" (Ps. 131:2). Esther offers her nephesh as the price of her people's; Haman, who spent no thought on the thousands of lives he sold, now begs frantically for his one. The Restoration puts the stakes plainly: "the worth of souls is great in the sight of God" (D&C 18:10) — every nephesh, the queen's and the condemned people's and even the enemy's, weighed and never treated as cheap. Esther learned to spend her soul for others; Haman learned too late that his own was not exempt.

sheelah (H7596) / baqqashah (H1246) (שְׁאֵלָה / בַּקָּשָׁה) — **petition, a thing asked / request, a thing sought vv. 2, 3.**

The king's standing offer pairs two nouns — "What is thy *petition* (sheelah)?... and what is thy *request* (baqqashah)?" (v. 2) — and Esther takes up both exactly: "let my life be given me at my *petition* (sheelah), and my people at my *request* (baqqashah)" (v. 3). Sheelah comes from sha'al, "to ask," the root behind Saul's name (the "asked-for" one) and behind Hannah's vow over Samuel — "for this child I prayed... the LORD hath given me my *petition* which I asked of him" (1 Sam. 1:27). Baqqashah is from baqash, "to seek," the verb of "seek, and ye shall find" (Matt. 7:7). Together they frame the whole grammar of asking rightly: Esther petitions for a life and seeks the deliverance of a people, and she does it "at" the banquet she prepared, in the timing she chose. The Lord invites exactly this boldness of the well-timed ask — "ask, and it shall be given you" (Matt. 7:7); "ask in faith, nothing wavering" (James 1:6); "whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name... shall be given unto you" (3 Ne. 18:20). Offered half a kingdom, Esther's sheelah is the smallest thing imaginable and the largest — not gold, not power, but that she and hers be allowed to live. Sometimes the boldest prayer is not for more, but simply not to be destroyed.

oyev (H341) (אֹיֵב) — **enemy, one who is hostile, foe v. 6.** "The adversary and *enemy* (oyev) is this wicked Haman." The Hebrew phrase is ish tsar we-oyev — literally "a man, adversary (tsar) and enemy (oyev)" — doubling the accusation so it cannot be mistaken. Oyev is the standard Hebrew word for the covenant people's foe, and it carries the memory of an ancient hostility: Haman is introduced in this book as "the Agagite" (Esth. 3:1), a descendant of Agag the Amalekite king (1 Sam. 15:8) — and of Amalek the LORD said, "I will have war with Amalek from generation to generation" (Ex. 17:16), the enemy who "smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble" (Deut. 25:18). So the "enemy" Esther names is not merely personal; he is the latest face of the oldest oyev of Israel. The Psalms are full of the cry that God will not abandon his own to the enemy — "let not mine enemies triumph over me" (Ps. 25:2), "thou hast delivered my soul from death" (Ps. 116:8). And the Restoration reads every such deliverance as a shadow of the last one, when "the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. 15:26). Haman the oyev falls; the pattern holds — the enemy of the covenant people, generation after generation, does not finally prevail.

chemah (H2534) (חֵמָה) — **heat, wrath, burning anger, fury vv. 7, 10.** Chemah brackets the chapter's climax. The king rises "in his *wrath* (chemah)" (v. 7), goes to the garden, and returns to pass sentence; and the chapter ends "then was the king's

wrath (chemah) pacified" (v. 10). The word means literally heat — the burning of anger — and its rise and cooling frame the entire execution. It is a fearsome word in the mouth of God: "God is angry with the wicked" and "a fire is kindled in mine anger" (Deut. 32:22); the Psalmist prays "O LORD, rebuke me not in thy *hot displeasure*" (Ps. 6:1). Here, though, the wrath is a Persian despot's, and the narrator makes a quiet theological point by what he does NOT say: the wrath that saves the covenant people is never once called God's. It burns in a pagan king who does not know he is an instrument. Yet the reader who knows Proverbs hears the counsel underneath — "the *wrath* of a king is as messengers of death" (Prov. 16:14) — and knows that the God who is nowhere named has bent even a drunken king's fury to the deliverance of his people. The Restoration holds both edges of chemah together: the God whose "anger is kindled" against wickedness (D&C 63:32) is the same God whose "*fierce anger*" is finally turned away from his covenant people when the enemy falls. Wrath cools here not by accident but by design no one at the table can see.

ets (H6086) (עץ) — tree, wood, timber, gallows, stake vv. 9, 10. The word translated "gallows" is ets — simply "tree" or "wood." Haman is hanged on a *tree*, and the double resonance is impossible to miss for the Latter-day Saint reader. In the law, a body hanged on a tree carried a curse: "he that is hanged is accursed of God" (Deut. 21:23) — the enemy of the covenant people dies under the very sign of the curse he tried to lay on them. But the same ets runs forward to a hill outside Jerusalem, where One who was NOT accursed hung on a tree and bore the curse anyway: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13); "who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24). And it reaches back, too, to another ets — the "tree of life" whose fruit is "most sweet, above all that... is white, to exceed all the whiteness" (1 Ne. 8:11; 11:8–25), the tree that IS the love of God. So the wood cuts two ways across all scripture: Haman's tree is the curse recoiling on the man who built it, and Calvary's tree is the curse absorbed by the Man who did not deserve it, so that the tree of life could be opened to everyone else. Haman prepared his ets for another and died on it himself; Christ was prepared for the ets by others and turned it into the instrument of every other person's deliverance. Same word; opposite direction.

From the Chapter's Architecture

The physical staging carries the meaning. The king moves out to the garden and back (vv. 7–8), and that exit is the pivot on which the scene swings: Haman is safe while the king deliberates and doomed the instant he returns, undone not by the accusation but by his own panicked posture on the couch. And the chapter's final image answers its own earlier one across two chapters — the fifty-cubit gallows of Esther 5:14, built in pride, becomes the gallows of Esther 7:10, filled by its builder. The architecture is the theology: everything Haman set in motion curves back to its origin. The banquet he was honored to attend, the couch he fell upon, the wood he raised — each becomes an instrument of his fall. A chapter whose God is never named is nonetheless shaped, top to bottom, like a verdict.