

The Book of Esther, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 5: Esther's Banquets and Haman's Pride

Esther 5:1-6:14

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

These two chapters are the hinge of the entire book, and the doctrinal stakes are high. God is never named in Esther, yet chapters 5 and 6 are saturated with His providence. A scepter is extended, a request is delayed, a king cannot sleep, a record is read, a question is asked at exactly the right hour, and a proud man is marched into public humiliation. None of it is labeled a miracle, and that is precisely the point. The class should leave seeing that God's sovereignty is not less real when it is hidden; it is often working most powerfully in the ordinary details we would never think to credit Him with. This guards against two errors: the notion that God only acts through the spectacular, and the despair that says God is absent when we cannot trace His hand.

Alongside providence, these chapters preach a stark and timeless lesson on pride. Haman is a portrait of a heart that lives for applause, and Scripture treats his trajectory as a fixed principle rather than a one-time event: pride goes before destruction, God resists the proud, whoever exalts himself will be humbled. The great reversal that begins in chapter 6 (Haman forced to honor the man he meant to kill) is the visible form of an invisible law that runs straight through the Bible and finds its perfect counter-image in Christ, who humbled Himself and was therefore exalted. We are not merely studying ancient palace intrigue; we are watching the moral architecture of God's universe on display.

The formational aim is to press both truths into the heart. First, to grow in trust: to help each student rest in God's timing and quiet providence rather than forcing outcomes or concluding God has gone silent. Second, to grow in humility: to help each student name and lay down the craving for recognition that quietly governs so many of our moods and choices, and to take up instead the patient, self-controlled, others-honoring posture modeled by Esther and embodied by Jesus. The lesson should end not in mere admiration of a good story but in concrete repentance and renewed trust.

Question 1

Student Question:

When Esther stood in the inner court risking death and the king extended the golden scepter, what does this turning point teach about how God can open doors and dispose a ruler's heart toward His purposes even when His name is never mentioned (Proverbs 21:1)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Esther 5:1 opens on the third day, the appointed end of the fast called in chapter 4. The phrase carries weight: Esther has not rushed, she has prepared, and only now does she put on her royal apparel and stand in the inner court of the king's house. The writer lingers on the physical layout (she stands over against the king's house while the king sits on his throne over against the gate) to heighten the distance and the danger. Every reader who knows the law of 4:11 understands that this is a life-or-death threshold.

When the king sees Queen Esther standing in the court, she obtained favor in his sight, and he held out to her the golden scepter. The text states the outcome plainly and without explanation. There is no record of what moved the king's heart in that instant, and that restraint is intentional. The book consistently shows results while keeping causes hidden, inviting the reader to supply what the narrator will not name: the hand of God turning a king's heart (Proverbs 21:1).

Esther draws near and touches the top of the scepter, the formal sign that she is received and her life is safe. The crisis of approach is resolved in a single verse, but the larger crisis (the decree against her people) has not yet been touched. The scene establishes both relief and suspense at once.

For a church-of-Christ class, the timeless principle is the disposing providence of God over rulers and circumstances. We do not read miracle into the silence, but neither do we read God out of it. Faithful action prepared by prayer and fasting met an open door, and the believer learns to act in trust while leaving the outcome to God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's providence is real and active even when unnamed and unseen (Romans 8:28).
- The Lord can turn the heart of a king as He wills (Proverbs 21:1).
- Faithful preparation (here, fasting and a settled resolve) precedes faithful action.
- Esther's courage is the steady kind that has counted the cost beforehand, not reckless impulse.

Discussion Prompts

- What details in verse 1 emphasize the danger Esther faced as she approached the king?
- Why do you think the narrator never tells us why the king extended the scepter, and what does that silence invite us to see?
- How does Esther's three days of preparation shape the way she steps into this moment?

Question 2

Student Question:

Esther had prepared with three days of fasting before she acted. Where in your own life do you tend to act first and pray later, and what would change if you prepared your heart before stepping into a hard conversation?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

With the scepter extended, the king offers Esther up to half the kingdom (5:3), a lavish, conventional royal expression of favor. Here is the moment most of us would seize to pour out the whole crisis. Esther does not. She simply invites the king and Haman to a banquet she has prepared that day.

The wisdom of this restraint is worth dwelling on. Esther has the king's attention and his goodwill, but she chooses to build the moment rather than spend it. She is reading the situation, honoring the king with hospitality, and refusing to let her urgency dictate her timing. The narrative slows down precisely where a less wise person would speed up.

Her specific request that Haman be included is striking. She places her enemy at the very table where she will eventually expose him, and she does so without alarming him. This is shrewdness in the best biblical sense, the wisdom of the serpent joined to the harmlessness of the dove.

The lesson for us is the discipline of patience and self-control. Trusting God's timing is not passivity; it is active, prayerful restraint that refuses to force the moment before it is ripe. Many good causes have been wrecked by impatience, and many have been won by those willing to wait one more day.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Wise timing is a form of trust, not a failure of nerve.
- Self-control and patience are fruit of a heart yielded to God (Galatians 5:22–23).
- Esther honors the king and disarms her enemy through deliberate hospitality.
- Urgency must not be allowed to override wisdom and discernment.
- Trusting God's timing means acting faithfully while leaving outcomes to Him.

Discussion Prompts

- Why might Esther have chosen a banquet rather than stating her request immediately?
- What does it cost a person to wait when everything in them wants to rush?
- Where in your life is patience being asked of you right now?

Question 3

Student Question:

Esther chose to delay her request through two banquets rather than blurting it out. What does her patience and wise timing teach us about trusting God's timing instead of forcing our own moment?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

At the first banquet the king repeats his open-ended offer (5:6), and once more Esther declines to make her petition. Instead she invites the king and Haman to a second banquet the next day, promising she will then do as the king has said (5:7–8). The delay is deliberate and now doubled.

We are not told all of Esther's reasoning, and the text leaves room for both her wisdom and God's providence to be at work. What we can see is that this further delay creates the precise window in which the events of chapter 6 (the king's sleepless night) will unfold. The pause that looks like mere caution becomes the space in which God's unseen hand will move.

This is a vital pattern in the life of faith. The delays we chafe against are often the very intervals in which God is arranging deliverance we cannot yet see. Esther's second invitation will turn out to have been perfectly timed, not by her foresight alone but by a providence working underneath her caution.

The class should hold two truths together: Esther acted wisely, and God overruled even her wisdom for good. Human responsibility and divine providence are not rivals in Scripture; they cooperate. We do our faithful part and discover afterward that God was weaving more than we knew.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Delays in God's providence often become the very space for deliverance.
- Human wisdom and divine providence work together, not against each other (Proverbs 16:9).
- What looks like ordinary caution can be the hinge on which deliverance turns.
- Faith trusts that God is working even in the waiting we did not choose.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the second delay set up the events of chapter 6?
- Can you recall a delay in your life that later proved to be God's perfect timing?
- How do human wisdom and God's providence work together in this scene?

Question 4

Student Question:

When have you damaged something good by rushing it, and what is one situation right now where God may be calling you to wait, watch, and pray rather than push?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Haman leaves the queen's banquet joyful and with a glad heart (5:9). For a moment he is at the summit of his ambitions, dining privately with royalty. Then he passes the king's gate and sees

Mordecai, who neither stands nor moves for him, and in an instant Haman is filled with indignation against Mordecai.

The narrative places joy and rage in adjoining clauses on purpose. A heart that lives for honor is utterly at the mercy of the next slight. One unbowed man at one gate can drain all the gladness out of a banquet with a queen. This is the bondage of pride: it hands the keys of our peace to other people's responses.

Yet Haman restrains himself and goes home, gathers his friends and his wife Zeresh, and rehearses his glory: his riches, his many sons, his promotions above all the princes, and his exclusive invitation to the queen's table (5:10–12). He builds a monument to himself out of words.

The lesson cuts close. Most of us are not plotting murder, but most of us know exactly the feeling of a good day soured by one withheld bit of respect. Haman is a mirror, and the question for the class is what our own version of Mordecai at the gate reveals about where we are seeking our worth.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Pride makes our peace hostage to the approval of others.
- A heart that lives for honor swings violently between elation and rage.
- Rehearsing our own accomplishments is a symptom of insecurity, not strength.
- The craving for recognition is a form of idolatry that never satisfies.
- Mordecai's quiet refusal to bow exposes the fragility of Haman's pride.

Discussion Prompts

- Why can one man's refusal to bow ruin an entire day of triumph for Haman?
- What does Haman's recital of his achievements reveal about his inner state?
- What is the one withheld respect that can sour an otherwise good day for you?

Question 5

Student Question:

Haman, surrounded by riches and honors, declared that all of it availed him nothing as long as Mordecai would not bow. What does this expose about the emptiness of pride and the craving for recognition (Ecclesiastes 2:11)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Haman's wife Zeresh and his friends offer their counsel: build a gallows fifty cubits high and ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai hanged on it, and then go merrily to the banquet (5:14). The advice pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made. The height (about seventy-five feet) is grotesque, a structure built less for execution than for spectacle and ego.

Note the irony the narrator is quietly assembling. Haman builds the instrument of Mordecai's death the very night before the king will honor Mordecai, and the gallows will ultimately serve Haman himself. Pride is here literally constructing its own downfall, and it does so with great satisfaction.

There is also a sobering picture of bad counsel. Those closest to Haman feed his worst impulse, and he is eager to receive it. Surrounding ourselves with people who only flatter our pride is a path to ruin; the friends and the wife who cheer him on will, in 6:13, be the ones who pronounce his doom.

For the believer, the principle is fixed: pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall (Proverbs 16:18). Haman cannot see it, but the reader can. The gallows rising in his courtyard is a sermon in wood, and the whole class is meant to feel the dramatic irony pressing toward a single conclusion: this will not end the way Haman thinks.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Pride literally builds the instrument of its own destruction.
- Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall (Proverbs 16:18).
- Counsel that only flatters our worst impulses leads to ruin.
- The fifty-cubit gallows is spectacle and ego more than justice.
- God's irony is at work: the trap Haman sets will catch Haman.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the enormous height of the gallows reveal about Haman's motives?
- How does the counsel of Zeresh and Haman's friends contrast with godly counsel?
- Where do you see the dramatic irony the narrator is building in this verse?

Question 6

Student Question:

Be honest about your own heart: what is the one withheld bit of recognition or respect that can sour an otherwise good day for you, and what does that reveal about where you are seeking your worth?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Chapter 6 opens with one of the most famous understatements in Scripture: on that night the king could not sleep (6:1). The Hebrew is plain, almost flat, and it carries the entire weight of the book's theology. Of all the nights, this night; of all the cures for insomnia, the reading of the chronicles; of all the pages, the one recording Mordecai's unrewarded loyalty (6:2).

God is not named, yet His fingerprints are everywhere. A sleepless king is the smallest, most ordinary thing imaginable, and through it the entire deliverance pivots. The class should sit with

how God governs the universe down to the level of a restless night and a clerk's choice of which scroll to read. Nothing is too small to be an instrument of providence.

The record reminds the king that Mordecai had exposed the assassination plot of chapter 2, and that nothing had been done to honor him (6:3). For years a good deed had gone unrewarded, and the timing of its rediscovery is exquisite, arriving on the one night when it can be used to overturn Haman's plan.

Here is deep comfort for the believer doing right in obscurity. Mordecai's loyalty was not forgotten by God even when forgotten by men. The God who keeps the chronicles of heaven loses no good deed, and He brings each to remembrance at the hour of His choosing (Hebrews 6:10).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God governs the smallest details, even a king's sleeplessness, toward His purposes.
- Providence often works through ordinary events that no one would call miraculous.
- No good deed done in obscurity is forgotten by God (Hebrews 6:10).
- God's timing in rewarding Mordecai is exquisite and not accidental.
- The unnamed God of Esther is nonetheless the sovereign actor in every scene.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does the writer record something as small as the king's insomnia?
- How does the timing of the chronicle reading display God's providence?
- Where are you doing right now with no recognition, and how does this verse encourage you?

Question 7

Student Question:

The king's sleepless night, the reading of the chronicles, and the discovery of Mordecai's unrewarded loyalty all converged at exactly the right moment. How does this string of ordinary details display the quiet sovereignty and providence of God (Romans 8:28)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The timing tightens almost to comedy. The king asks who is in the court just as Haman arrives, having come early to ask permission to hang Mordecai on the gallows he built (6:4–5). The two men's purposes are about to collide, and only the reader knows how exquisitely crossed they are.

The king asks Haman what should be done for the man the king delights to honor, and Haman, certain it must mean himself, designs the most extravagant honor he can imagine (6:6): royal robes the king has worn, a horse the king has ridden, a royal crown on the horse, and a noble

prince to lead him through the city proclaiming the king's delight (6:7-9). Haman's own vanity composes the very ceremony that will exalt his enemy.

This is the heart of the great reversal. Haman's pride is the instrument of his humiliation; the more lavishly he honors himself in imagination, the more lavishly he will be forced to honor Mordecai in fact. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled (Luke 14:11) is dramatized here with almost unbearable precision.

The class should notice that Haman is undone not by an enemy's scheme but by his own assumption that the world revolves around him. Self-centeredness blinds him to every other possibility. Pride is not only a sin; it is a form of stupidity, a failure to see reality as it is.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Whoever exalts himself will be humbled (Luke 14:11).
- Haman's vanity designs the honor that will exalt the man he meant to kill.
- Pride blinds us to reality and to any perspective but our own.
- The great reversal turns Haman's self-exaltation into the means of his disgrace.
- God uses the proud man's own assumptions to bring him low.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Haman assume the king must mean to honor him?
- How does Haman's elaborate proposal reveal what he most desires?
- What does this scene teach about the blindness that pride produces?

Question 8

Student Question:

Mordecai's good deed went unnoticed and unrewarded for years. Where are you currently doing right with no recognition, and how does this chapter encourage you to keep doing right and leave the timing of any reward to God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The king tells Haman to do exactly as he proposed, and then names the man: Mordecai the Jew who sits at the king's gate (6:10). Haman must let nothing fail of all that he has spoken. Every detail he designed for himself he must now perform for the one man on earth he most despises.

The narrative does not record Haman's words, only his obedience: he takes the robe and the horse, arrays Mordecai, and leads him through the city proclaiming, thus shall it be done to the man the king delights to honor (6:11). One can scarcely imagine a more complete humiliation, made worse because it is public and because he must speak the praise aloud himself.

This is the visible form of an invisible law. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). Mordecai, who quietly refused to grasp at honor, receives it; Haman, who grasped at it relentlessly, is made its unwilling herald. The reversal is exact and divinely just.

For the believer, the deepest fulfillment of this pattern is Christ. He did not grasp at honor but humbled Himself even to death on a cross, and therefore God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name above every name (Philippians 2:8–9). The principle on display in Susa is the principle written across the gospel: the way up is down.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6).
- Haman must publicly honor the man he intended to murder.
- Mordecai's quiet humility is exalted while Haman's grasping is debased.
- The reversal is exact, public, and divinely just.
- The pattern is perfected in Christ, who humbled Himself and was exalted (Philippians 2:8–9).

Discussion Prompts

- What makes Haman's task in this verse so complete a humiliation?
- How does Mordecai's reward illustrate that God gives grace to the humble?
- How does this reversal point forward to the exaltation of the humbled Christ?

Question 9

Student Question:

Haman built a gallows for Mordecai and was instead made to honor him publicly, the first turn of the great reversal in this book. What do the Scriptures teach about how pride sets up its own downfall and how God lifts the humble (Proverbs 16:18; James 4:6), and how is this principle ultimately fulfilled in Christ who humbled Himself and was exalted (Philippians 2:8–9)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Mordecai returns to the king's gate, unchanged by the honor, while Haman hurries home mourning, with his head covered in shame (6:12). The two responses tell two stories. Mordecai does not let exaltation go to his head; Haman cannot bear that he was not the one exalted. Honor reveals character as surely as suffering does.

At home Haman pours out everything to Zeresh and his friends, and now their counsel reverses. The same wife who suggested the gallows and the same friends who cheered him on now pronounce his doom: if Mordecai is of the seed of the Jews, you will not prevail against him but will surely fall before him (6:13). Their words land with the force of prophecy.

There is a sober recognition here that resisting God's covenant people is resisting God Himself, however unnamed He remains in the book. Even Haman's pagan household senses that an

unseen power stands behind Mordecai, and that Haman has begun a fall he cannot stop. The downfall of pride, once begun, gathers its own momentum.

While they are still speaking, the king's eunuchs arrive to bring Haman to the second banquet (6:14). The wheel is already turning toward the next chapter. The class should feel the relentlessness of it: there is no escape route for pride that has set itself against God's purposes. What Haman built is now coming for Haman.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honor, like suffering, reveals the true character of the heart.
- Those who fed Haman's pride now foretell his fall.
- To set oneself against God's people is, in the end, to set oneself against God.
- The downfall of pride, once begun, cannot be halted by the proud.
- God's unseen hand drives the events relentlessly toward justice.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the contrast between Mordecai's and Haman's reactions reveal about each man?
- Why do Zeresh and the friends now predict Haman's certain fall?
- How does this verse leave the reader feeling about the chapter that follows?

Question 10

Student Question:

Considering Esther's steady courage and Haman's self-destroying pride, name one specific way you sense the Lord forming humility, patience, or trust in His timing in you, and what is the first concrete step you will take this week to cooperate with that work?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Standing back from the two chapters, the great theme is the quiet sovereignty of God. Not one miracle occurs, not one prophet speaks, and God's name is never written, yet His providence governs every turn: a scepter extended, a banquet delayed, a sleepless night, a chronicle read, a question asked, a proud man marched in disgrace. The believer learns to read his own unmiraculous life the same way, trusting that the unnamed God is the unfailing actor behind the ordinary.

The second great theme is the downfall of pride and the exaltation of humility. Haman is the Bible's vivid case study in a fixed spiritual law: pride goes before destruction (Proverbs 16:18), God resists the proud (James 4:6), and whoever exalts himself will be humbled (Luke 14:11). Esther and Mordecai show the opposite posture, the patient, self-forgetful trust that God in His time lifts up.

These truths converge in Christ. The reversal in Susa, where the one who humbled himself is raised and the one who exalted himself is brought low, is a shadow of the gospel itself. Jesus humbled Himself to the point of death on a cross, and God exalted Him to the highest place (Philippians 2:8–9). The same God who turned a king's insomnia toward deliverance worked the cross and empty tomb toward the deliverance of all who trust and obey Him.

The formational aim, then, is twofold. First, let the class rest more deeply in God's providence and timing, refusing both the demand for the spectacular and the despair of the silent stretches. Second, let each person name and lay down the craving for recognition that quietly rules so many of our moods, taking up instead the humble, patient trust the Lord is forming in His people. The lesson should end not in admiration of a story but in repentance and renewed trust, with each one naming a concrete step of obedience for the week ahead.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's sovereignty is fully real even when fully hidden (Romans 8:28).
- Pride and humility run on fixed spiritual laws throughout Scripture (Proverbs 16:18; James 4:6; Luke 14:11).
- The reversal in Esther foreshadows the humbling and exaltation of Christ (Philippians 2:8–9).
- The Old Testament is written for our instruction and trust today (Romans 15:4).
- Trust in God's providence and the laying down of pride are the twin formational aims.
- Faith responds with concrete, obedient steps, not mere admiration of the story.

Discussion Prompts

- How do these two chapters reshape the way you read the ordinary, unmiraculous stretches of your own life?
- Where is the Lord asking you to lay down a craving for recognition and take up humble trust?
- What is one specific, concrete step of obedience you will take this week in response to this lesson?