

WEEK FIVE | THE GREAT REVERSAL

INTRODUCTION

At the center of the book we find its turning point, when Haman, the enemy of God's people, reaches his high point but then begins to fall, and Mordecai, the sentenced-to-death Jew, begins to rise. Esther is on the move, as she finds favor with the king in her approach and in her first banquet. But that banquet ends with the question of how she will proceed at the next day's banquet. Chapter 5 leaves us hanging, with Haman's gallows rising ominously against the night sky. It's chapter 6 that makes the turn, beginning with a king who could not sleep and ending with a dramatic reversal in the trajectories of these two men. That reversal will continue and accelerate to the book's end.

- Nielson, Kathleen. Ruth and Esther (Knowing the Bible) (p. 48)

Definitions:

Peripeteia: a sudden and unexpected change of fortune or reverse of circumstances

Chiasm (also called a chiasmus) is a literary device in which a sequence of ideas is presented and then repeated in reverse order. The result is a "mirror" effect as the ideas are "reflected" back in a passage.

START WITH SCRIPTURE

READ ESTHER 6:1-9 OBSERVATIONS

Between Esther's first banquet (ch. 5) and her second banquet (ch. 7), everything changes in that pivotal chapter 6. Read Esther 6:1-5 and comment on every seemingly "random" occurrence you notice in connection with these verses. How do you respond?

As you observe Haman in verses 6-9, what descriptive words come to mind? Do any proverbs come to mind? (Consider, for example, Prov. 16:18; 25:6-7.)

DISCUSSION

With chapter 6, the direction of the story has reversed itself. At this point, stop and summarize the ways in which this book lets us glimpse not only the courage and faithfulness of God's people but at the same time (and concentrated at the center) the hand of an amazing providence at work.

The repeated mention of Mordecai's Jewishness (5:13; 6:10, 13) reminds us of the point of God's providence in this story: it is to protect his people. Recall God's promises in Genesis 12:1–3 and 2 Samuel 7:12–17. What did God promise to do through his chosen people?

The truth of God's sovereign guidance of all things emerges with special impact in this central chapter 6. There is no great miracle, like that of the Red Sea, in this story. There is, at this crucial juncture, simply the fact that the king couldn't sleep. (And then there's the choosing of a book to read . . .) That God should work through such common, ordinary occurrences is most wonderful, for it reminds us of his sovereign redemptive purposes in every common, ordinary occurrence of our lives—whether we see it and name it as his providence or not. Esther's courageous plan of action encases chapter 6, but chapter 6 stands as the book's hinge, a hinge turned by God's providential hand.

Spend a few minutes sharing testimony of God's providential hand in your life. What are some major, or seemingly minor moments that God used to draw you near him? Protect you? Use you for his purposes?

PRACTICE

Personal Reflection:

Take time to reflect on the implications of Esther 5–6 for your own life today.

How has the Great Reversal changed you?

What fresh glimpses of the Gospel have you seen?

What practical lessons have you learned?