

## “Pop Goes the Weasel”

by Greg Smith-Young (Elora-Bethany Pastoral Charge)

Third in a series on the Book of Esther

Esther 5-6

January 24, 2016

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*[Zeph shuffles in. A bright, helium-filled balloon is attached to his cane. He pays no attention to it.]*

Well, I'm back. I hope you are twice as glad about that as I am.

Last time, it was bad. Because of Haman. Next to the King, the most powerful man in all Persia. Haman hates Jews. One in particular, Mordecai. Mordecai won't show Haman the honour Haman thinks he deserves. Haman's ego can't handle that. So Haman schemes to destroy, not just Mordecai, but all the Jews in the empire. And, he gets the King to agree. (We went over all that last time.)

I'm picking up the story now. Haman is going home. He's had a long day, but there is a spring in his step. Not only is he rich. Not only is he powerful. Not only is he getting his way over his enemies. He has just had dinner! An intimate affair, with just the King and Queen Esther. She personally requested that he, Haman, join them! Wait 'til people find out . . . and he'll make sure they do.

### II

Haman is so full of himself, he's empty.

We Jews have a word, *kabod*. *Kabod* means weight, heavy. Someone with *kabod* has weight, substance in their character. They have a good, well-earned reputation. People look at them and see honour. The English word for that is “glory.”

We have another word, *hebel*. *Hebel* means empty, worthless. The English word is “vain.”

Haman needs everyone to think he has *kabod*, glory. Really, he is *hebel*, empty. In English, “vainglory.”<sup>1</sup> That's when you're always putting on a show, parading around, wanting people to notice how great you are, chasing their applause.

Haman is diseased with this. But we can catch it too.

You need people to notice your green lawn, or that fine pie you made. (Give me a piece, and I'll let you know). “That's a snappy suit!” “That's a smokin' dress!” “Nice smartphone!” (Whatever that is.) “Great sermon, rabbi!” “Great job acting like an old Jewish guy, Greg!”

“She's got a Lexus, she must be a winner.” “He drives a Porsche, he must be virile.” “She drives a Prius, she's progressive.” Nothing wrong with these things . . . though my Ruthie

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<sup>1</sup> See the excellent discussion of vainglory in Rebecca Konyonkyk DeYoung, [Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and their Remedies](#) (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 59-77.

won't let me get a sports car, says I'm virile enough! (Nice.)

But when you want them so people will cheer you, that's vainglory. It strikes easy. And Haman's got it bad.

He's coming home. Dinner went so well, Queen Esther is planning another and again, she has insisted that Haman join them. Can it get any better?

Well, we know better. Haman doesn't know that Queen Esther is putting together these fine dinners, to make the right moment to ask the King to save the Jews from Haman's plot. And he doesn't know that Esther herself is a Jew!

[To reader:] You've got something to read? Let's hear it!

That day Haman left Esther's place happy, his spirits high, but then he saw Mordecai in the King's Gate. Mordecai neither stood up nor seemed the least bit nervous around him, so Haman suddenly felt great rage toward Mordecai. But Haman held himself back and went on home. He sent word that his friends and his wife Zeresh should join him there. Haman boasted to them about his great wealth and his many sons. He told all about how the king had honored him by promoting him over the officials and high royal workers. "Best of all," Haman said, "Queen Esther has invited no one else but me to join the king for food and drinks that she has prepared. In fact, I've been called to join the king at her place tomorrow! But all this loses its meaning every time I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King's Gate."

So his wife Zeresh and all his friends told him: "Have people prepare a pointed pole seventy-five feet high. In the morning, tell the king to have Mordecai impaled on it. Then you can go with the king to the feast in a happy mood." Haman liked the idea and had the pole prepared.

Esther 5.9-14  
Common English Bible

III

[To reader:] Would you please stop there.

*Pride goes before ruin,  
Arrogance, before failure.*

Proverbs 16.18 (JPSV)

Remember that. It's one of the proverbs. (Nice.)

The next morning, Haman shows up early for work. He's got it all planned. He's going to ask the King to have Mordecai the Jew killed, executed, strung up on that huge pole that Haman himself had erected. Why so big? My Ruthie would have something to say here. I'm just going to say that Haman wants everyone to see that he's a bigger man than Mordecai. (Nice.)

But, Haman does not know that last night, it so happened the King couldn't sleep. So he had a book read to him. It happened to be a record of important events. (Nothing like re-living the good old days!) They happened to read the part about a plot against the King. The plot was only stopped when someone overheard it and sounded the alarm. That someone? It happened to be Mordecai the Jew, who saved the King's life. It just so happened, there was an oversight and Mordecai had never been honoured. And, it happened that the King was thinking of doing something nice for Mordecai, just as Haman came in that morning to demand Mordecai's death.

Now, she's going to read some more. But first, this Psalm:

*Why do nations assemble,  
and peoples plot vain things;  
kings of the earth take their stand,  
and regents intrigue together  
against the Lord and against His anointed? . . .  
He who is enthroned in heaven laughs;  
the Lord mocks at them.*

Psalms 2.1-2,4 (JPSV)

(Nice.) Now, go ahead.

When Haman entered, the king asked him, “What should be done for the man whom the king really wants to honor?”

Haman thought to himself, Whom would the king really want to honor more than me? So Haman said to the king, “Here’s what should be done for the man the king really wants to honor. Have servants bring out a royal robe that the king himself has worn and a horse on which the king himself has ridden. It should have a royal crest on its head. Then hand over the robe and the horse to another man, one of the king’s officials. Have him personally robe the man whom the king really wants to honor and lead him on the horse through the city square. As he goes, have him shout, ‘This is what the king does for the man he really wants to honor!’”

Then the king said to Haman, “Hurry, take the robe and the horse just as you’ve said and do exactly that for Mordecai the Jew, who works at the King’s Gate. Don’t leave out a single thing you’ve said!”

So Haman took the robe and the horse and put the robe on Mordecai. He led him on horseback through the city square, shouting as he went, “This is what the king does for the man he really wants to honor!” Afterward, Mordecai returned to the King’s Gate, while Haman hurried home feeling great shame, his head covered.

Esther 6.6-12  
Common English Bible

#### IV

Like my balloon. Big. Bright. Demands to be noticed!

Haman had to tell his friends and his wife about all his money, and all his honours, and all his promotions, and his high status. (You think they didn’t already know?) And about all his sons. (You think his wife didn’t know?).

He’s got everything. But then, just one person, Mordecai the Jew, doesn’t bow down to him. . . . [*Zeph pulls out a pin, and pops the balloon*] . . . goes the weasel.

Vainglory. *Kabod hebel*.

Why do we pump ourselves up? When we’re worried we’ve got nothing inside. And, deathly afraid that others will notice. We fake it because we’re scared we’ll never make it.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> DeYoung, 72.

V

Haman is heading home for lunch now. But he's not hungry. He knows he's been brought down, humiliated, burst.

He's done it to himself. The King wasn't out to humiliate Haman. As usual, His Highness has no idea what's going on. Mordecai, well, being paraded around like the biggest show in town wasn't his idea. Haman had planned the procession, except he thought it was for himself. That's Irony.

Haman has no idea what he's up against. But his wife wonders. Remember back in chapter 1, the King decreed that it's men who are in charge. In this Book of Esther, it is often the women, who have no power, who figure things out and make things happen. That's Irony. (As my Ruthie says, behind every man is a woman rolling her eyes. Nice.)

The cure for vainglory is a good dose of God. When you see all the ways God has been working, and stop thinking you've done it yourself, and remember that everything good comes from God . . . vainglory loses its hold on you. And you give the glory where it really belongs.

But I've said it before, that God isn't even mentioned in this Book of Esther. So we have to carefully look for signs that God's up to something. That's life. You gotta look for the signs of God.

Was it just chance that the King had insomnia that night, and chance that he picked up that book, and turned to that part about Mordecai saving his life, and realized Mordecai still need to be rewarded, and chance that Haman was marching in to destroy Mordecai just as the King was wondering what to do for him? Chance? Or, is something else is going on? Maybe "Someone" is messing with things, in a good way. If that's true, Haman's wife is right. He hasn't got a chance.

But then, everyone has a chance when God is messing with things.

See you next time.