



Queen Esther Seeking Permission to Speak, mosaic by Lilian Broca

QUEEN ESTHER & THE ANONYMOUS MIRACLE MAKER

Esther 7:1-6; 9:10; 9:1-2; 20-22; 29-32

(7:1-6) So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. On the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, "What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled." Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have won your favor, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me—that is my petition—and the lives of my people—that is my request. For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace, but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king." Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who has presumed to do this?" Esther said, "A foe and an enemy, this wicked Haman!" Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen. (7:9-10) Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, "Look, the very pole that Haman has prepared for

Mordecai, whose word saved the king, stands at Haman's house, fifty cubits high." And the king said, "Hang him on that." So they hung Haman on the pole that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the anger of the king abated. (9:20-22) Mordecai recorded these things and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, enjoining them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same month, year by year, as the days on which the Jews gained relief from their enemies and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday, that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor. (9:29-32) Queen Esther daughter of Abihail, along with Mordecai the Jew, gave full written authority confirming this second letter about Purim. Letters were sent wishing peace and security to all the Jews, to the one hundred twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, and giving orders that these days of Purim should be observed at their appointed seasons, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther enjoined on the Jews, just as they had laid down for themselves and for their descendants regulations concerning their fasts and their lamentations. The command of Esther fixed these practices of Purim, and it was recorded in writing.

Coincidence as Providence. The Book of Esther never once mentions God by name. It is the only book of the Bible with that dubious distinction. And yet there is *something* at work in the story – in the randomness of Esther's ascent to the throne, in the insomnia of the king, in the testimony of eunuchs.

A Canadian artist named Lilian Broca¹ – herself a Jewish immigrant – spent seven years creating a mosaic series tracing the arc of Esther's story. Broca describes the Esther we meet at the beginning as a passive figure, a woman whose place in the court is clear: *be beautiful and keep quiet*. But the king asks Esther her deepest wish, her petition. And then at the perfect time, Esther is moved to speak.

God doesn't always need a talking snake, or a burning bush, or a parting sea to do good work. Sometimes God just *arranges the timing of things*, makes sure the right person is in the right room at the right moment, *if* – as Mordecai told Esther – *if* that someone is willing to stand up and take action *for just such a time as this*. Albert Einstein said that a coincidence is a miracle in which God chooses to remain anonymous.² So breathe it in. Open your senses, open your heart, let in all that is possible, in the right now.

*Such a time as this.*³ Yesterday, if you were watching, the nation threw itself a party. Fireworks. Speeches. Record heat. Violent storms. Climate change denial. A National Mall reflecting pool surrounded by chain link and

¹ <https://www.lilianbroca.com/queen-esther-mosaics>. The image above is Broca's *Queen Esther Seeking Permission to Speak* mosaic.

² For oratorical weight, I attributed this quote to Einstein, as do most online sources, such as https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/albert_einstein_574924. It is perhaps more rightly attributable to novelist Irene Hannon, <https://quotefancy.com/quote/160842/Irene-Hannon-A-coincidence-is-a-small-miracle-in-which-God-chooses-to-remain-anonymous>. See also the following footnote link.

³ Esther 4:14 is the title of last week's sermon by Rev. Joann Lee, [https://irp.cdn-website.com/95473ce8/files/uploaded/Sermon+06-28-26+JHL+\(1\).pdf](https://irp.cdn-website.com/95473ce8/files/uploaded/Sermon+06-28-26+JHL+(1).pdf). This sermon concludes preaching series on Ruth & Esther, resourced from

patrolled by armed guards. All the things that makes us us! Yet, groups of people gathered in townships and cities around the nation, still hopeful, still resolute, still faithful to one another. A proud and painful spectacle of a country marking two hundred and fifty years of existence. How are *you* on this morning after?

The story of Ester was composed some twenty-five-hundred years ago. The vintage is important – not because the ancient world was simpler. (It wasn't.) Not because it offers us easy answers for what ails us. (It can't.) But because this story is about surviving inside an empire that had decided *you are the problem*. It's about what to do if and when they come for your neighbors, or, God forbid, for you. Such a time *is* this.

Kakistocracy. In the Persian court of King Ahasuerus, there's an angry little man called Haman. He has offered the king a staggering amount of money to finance the genocide of the Jews, who were already a disenfranchised minority.⁴

King Ahasuerus enjoyed unlimited power. He valued his comfort. The kingdom's welfare? Not so much. There's an English word for this worst kind of leadership: kakistocracy.⁵ It means when the worst people are in charge of the government. Kakistocracy: the monkeys are running the zoo; the Roomba is driving the bus; the insurrectionists are running government agencies.⁶ Kakistocracy.

The Royal Marionette. King Ahasuerus, writes biblical scholar Robert Alter, is worse than a villain; he is a *puppet*.⁷ He signs whatever is put before him by whoever flatters him last. In today's reading, he's just banished his number one wife, Queen Vashti, on a random courtier's advice! He's undisciplined, impulsive, chaotic. He sees Esther's beauty and thinks "King like-y." With no interview, no background check – no flowers, no candy – he appoints Esther as Queen of Persia. Now, under Haman's influence, he signs a decree authorizing genocide – without reading it – and later, he will sign its opposite. Ahasuerus is a marionette, and Haman pulls the strings. Haman is an ancient example of Stephen Miller.⁸

Like Stephen Miller, Haman employed a process that the philosopher René Girard⁹ would recognize immediately. First step: identify and amplify the community's anxiety. Destabilize the peace, make the people desperate for order. Next: choose someone to blame. Select a group that lives among the community but remains distinct such as immigrants or groups who practice a non-dominant religion. Haman projects the nation's ginned-up anxiety onto the Jews. *Those people* are now the danger. Next, call this a sad necessity, cleaning up the mess left behind by the incompetent Babylonians. Call it order. One thing I will say for Haman, he did not stoop to calling it the will of God.¹⁰ Haman chose the Jews because of one man, Mordecai, would not bow to him. And this somehow justified a decree against an entire people. That is how scapegoating works in every age, in every empire. Jesus was scapegoated by the Roman Empire and its religious adherents.

Purim. In his most cynical move, Haman casts lots – he rolled dice – to determine when the genocide would commence. To this day, when the Jews celebrate Purim they boo and hiss at the name Haman. The festival sometimes takes on a carnivalesque atmosphere with excessive drinking and gambling. Purim means dice.

Pitching the Dice. Two weeks ago, three pitchers on the San Francisco Giants – Roupp, Brubaker, and Walker – took the mound on Pride Night and pitched their *purim* with a Bible verse written on their caps. The rainbow flood covenant, repurposed as a protest against the rainbow itself. A fourth player simply refused to wear the Pride cap. Major League Baseball issued warnings. The Giants' manager called it a matter of personal freedom and moved on. The Department of Justice has now opened an inquiry – not into the players, but into whether the league violated their rights by reprimanding them.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/narrative-lectionary/preaching-series-on-ruth-esther-week-6-of-6/commentary-on-esther-71-6-9-10-920-22-29-32>.

⁴ <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/babylonian-captivity>

⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kakistocracy>

⁶ Numerous individuals connected to the January 6, 2021 Capitol riot have secured government agency roles, pardons, and political candidacies. Investigations by the House Judiciary Committee document individuals involved in the 2020 election subversion efforts and the Capitol attack employed in senior roles at the Department of Justice and Department of Homeland Security.

⁷ Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary, Volume 3: The Writings* (New York: Norton & Company, 2019), 713-716. Available in Calvary's library.

⁸ <https://www.splcenter.org/resources/extremist-files/stephen-miller/>

⁹ Predictably, the vice president likes to mischaracterize the philosophy of Rene Girard, reducing it to its opposite ("Do you own thing!"). Girard's theory explains the human practice of scapegoating as a means of organization, used to build power at the expense of a minority or weaker individual. <https://www.britannica.com/question/What-is-the-scapegoat-mechanism-in-Rene-Girards-theory>. For an unfiltered takedown of Vance's departure from Girard's theory, see < <https://www.christiancentury.org/features/postliberalism-and-romantic-lie>>.

¹⁰ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2026/01/stephen-miller-is-wrong-venezuela/>

I need you to see what that is. It is Haman's mechanism running in real time, in our own ballpark, as players take center stage on a night dedicated to San Francisco's tradition of inclusion to state publicly that not all paying customers are equal, not if it means these men have to soften their homophobic identities. They signaled to bullies and Hamans everywhere: gay bashing is back on the menu. Those people are the problem. And they're getting away with it in San Francisco.¹¹

Roll the dice. Six weeks ago, a gathering on the National Mall was billed as the rededication of the nation to God. The Speaker of the House led a prayer¹² denouncing "sinister ideologies" meaning the history of religion, of Black studies, of civil rights, about genocide. In doing so, he denied and denigrated the cost this nation has already paid for freedom. What was he praying for? Is he asking God for a do-over? Then, segregationists took the stage and quoted scripture. Opponents of interracial marriage quoted scripture. Defenders of slavery quoted scripture. The Speaker was standing in a long, well-lit tradition which is neither the tradition of the prophets or of Jesus Christ. Even the devil can cite scripture for his own purpose, wrote Shakespeare. But devil cannot follow Jesus Christ and remain the devil.

The OG Dice Roll. We know that it's been four years since Roe v Wade was overturned, but I bet you don't know how it all began. In the late 1970s, a group of men gathered – sometimes by phone, sometimes in conference rooms at a hotel in Lynchburg, Virginia – looking for their *pur*, their dice. They were led by Rev. Jerry Falwell in building a political movement, and they needed an issue.

At the time, the IRS was threatening the tax-exempt status of their Bob Jones University because it promoted racial segregation.¹³ They understood that segregation was not a viable issue around which to organize. Around 1978, they read the tea leaves of the midterm election and chose another topic, abortion. Until then, says Falwell's associate pastor, "abortion had never been mentioned as a reason to do something."¹⁴ So, on a conference call they cast their lot and decided to gin up outrage over abortion. And here we are today, living the fallout of their gamble. I wonder. What if they committed their time and energy to following Jesus? But instead, they chose power, fortune. Instead of Jesus, they chose empire.

Why stop there! The lot falls where power decides it falls – on trans children, on immigrants, on random members of the opposing party, like the Olympic canoeist who was indicted this week for observing algae. Roll the dice on next level corruption. Public funds redirected for private benefit. Regulatory agencies dismantled or weaponized. Our nation's constitutional order considered a mere inconvenience. The story of Esther names this kind of corruption, recognizes it as the pattern of empire. And The Bible makes it plain: such an empire is against God and God's people.

The Purim Miracle. But Ahasuerus grants Esther her deepest wish. Ask me for anything, he says, even half of the kingdom! She leads with herself. "Let my life be granted me – that is my petition – and the lives of my people – that is my request. For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed." Queen Esther makes herself the stakes before she names the enemy. She personalizes before she politicizes. She comes out as a Jew. And then, with the king's full emotional attention she outs Haman as the "foe and an enemy, this wicked Haman." And with this revelation, the marionette's strings are snipped.

This is where the story turns, the famous reversal of Esther. In Hebrew, it's **v'nahafoch hu**¹⁵ which means the situation was reversed; the opposite happened. Those marked to die now live. The villain who built the gallows now swings from it. Haman is impaled on the spit he erected for Mordecai. Comeuppance served cold. That how we rolled 2,500 years ago.

Today, the violence in this story is problematic, especially now with Gaza and Lebanon and Ukraine and Iran, and the kakistocracies of Russia and Israel spiraling before us. So, I want to be honest about the problematic nature of Haman's execution. Followers of Jesus do not revel in retaliation. Neither do modern day Jews. The Israeli government might, but the Israeli government is not "the Jews." The same is true here. Falwell reveled in scapegoating women, but Falwell was neither "the Christians" nor "the church." And Stephen Miller is not a normal American.

¹¹ https://www.change.org/p/demand-the-sf-giants-do-more-than-apologize-after-their-pride-night-protest?redirect_reason=guest_user&fbclid=IwY2xjawS5_wNleHRuA2FlbQlXMQBzcnRjBmFwcF9pZBAyMjIwMzkxNzg4MjAwODkyAAEeunKNlr5VfKnaUU4l86wa6_FCUa2TaJeyBcbg_YBCuWkmRLBOtWfCqUjk318_aem_BMAmXng1SlmARwRw3mYtNQ

¹² <https://www.aol.com/articles/1-minute-section-mike-johnsons-221653000.html>

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob_Jones_University_v._United_States

¹⁴ <https://www.vpm.org/npr-news/2006-06-22/book-excerpt-thy-kingdom-come>

¹⁵ <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/what-does-the-hebrew-purim-expression-vnahafoch-hu-mean/>

Mordecai's letter commands that Purim not become a festival of vengeance. He instructs the survivors to celebrate with feasts, and to send gifts of food to one another, and to give presents to the poor. It's written into the Purim's charter: the feast and the gift are inseparable. Salvation is empty until it is shared. Written into the charter of this nation are the aspirations of a people, survivors who still believe, beneath the politics and division.

*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all [human beings] are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*¹⁶

In the name of the Anonymous Miracle Maker. Amen.

By God our lot is cast. The service began with this national hymn. A coincidence...?

1 God of the ages, whose almighty hand
leads forth in beauty all the starry band
of shining worlds in splendor through the skies,
our grateful songs before your throne arise.

2 Your love divine has led us in the past,
in this free land by you our lot is cast;
be now our ruler, guardian, guide, and stay,
your Word, our law, your paths our chosen way.

3 From war's alarms, from deadly pestilence,
be your strong arm our ever sure defense;
your true religion in our hearts increase,
your bounteous goodness nourish us in peace.

4 Refresh your people on their toilsome way,
lead us from night to never-ending day;
fill all our lives with heaven-born love and grace,
and songs of praise we'll lift before your face!

¹⁶ <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>