

What does the phrase “to lay hands on” mean as used in the Bible, particularly in Esther 2:21?

Esther 2:21 (NKJV):

“In those days, while Mordecai sat within the king’s gate, two of the king’s eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, doorkeepers, became furious and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus.”

ANSWER:

In this context, the phrase “to lay hands on” does not mean to bless or ordain, as it does in other parts of Scripture. Instead, it refers to an intent to harm, assault, or kill. The two men, Bigthan and Teresh royal eunuchs assigned as doorkeepers were plotting to assassinate King Ahasuerus. While the Bible doesn’t specify their method (e.g., poisoning or stabbing), the use of the phrase “lay hands on” makes their violent intention unmistakable.

This idiomatic expression is used in several biblical passages to describe acts of aggression or murder. It conveys more than just physical contact it implies the exercise of destructive force or violence against someone, often unjustly.

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Theological Insight:

In biblical theology, the “laying on of hands” appears in two primary ways:

- 1. Positive usage: for imparting blessing, authority, healing, or the Holy Spirit.
Example: Acts 8:17 (NKJV)*
- 2. “Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.”*
- 3. Negative usage: as in intent to do harm, violence, or murder. This is the case in Esther 2:21. It reflects the heart’s rebellion against God’s established authority.*

Cross-reference: David and Saul

A powerful parallel appears in 1 Samuel 24:4–7, where David had an opportunity to kill King Saul, who had been unjustly hunting him. However, David refused to harm Saul because Saul had been anointed by God:

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1 Samuel 24:6 (NKJV):

“And he said to his men, ‘The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord’s anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord.’”

David’s words “to stretch out my hand” are synonymous with “to lay hands on,” again showing intent to do harm. But unlike the conspirators in Esther, David feared God and would not violate the sacredness of God’s anointed authority even when Saul was in the wrong.

This moment highlights a deep theological truth: It is God who raises up kings and removes them (Daniel 2:21), and it is not man’s place to take justice into his own hands especially against someone set apart by divine appointment.

Spiritual Application:

Respect for authority: Even when leaders are flawed, God calls His people to honor the positions He has established (Romans 13:1-2).

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Judgment belongs to the Lord: As seen with David, true spiritual maturity submits to God. God sees hidden plots: Like Mordecai discovering the plot in Esther, God often works through seemingly small events to protect His purposes and people.

Conclusion:

The phrase “to lay hands on” in Esther 2:21 (NKJV) refers specifically to an attempt to harm or kill. It is a warning about rebellion and violence, particularly against God’s appointed authority. When compared to David’s restraint in 1 Samuel 24, it underscores the call for God’s people to walk in reverence, patience, and divine obedience, trusting in the justice and sovereignty of the Lord.

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” – Romans 12:21 (NKJV)

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