

ESTHER PROVIDENCE DISPLAYED

Lesson #2

RECAP FROM LAST WEEK:

When we left our heroine, Esther, last week, we had just been introduced to the main villain of the Book of Esther – Haman.

We discovered Haman’s hate for Mordecai and all Jews had been from a generational feud between the Amalekites and the Jews. Haman had probably been taught from birth the story of the Jewish prophet, Samuel, killing King Agag, the King of the Amalekites (and a direct descendent of Haman).

Haman’s hate had festered and occupied an irrational place in his life. Hate consumed him. He probably felt every bad thing was directly because of the Jews, and every good thing was somehow less “shiny” because they existed.

Before you judge Haman too harshly, beware that you are not harboring the makings of this same irrational hate. Presently, our political climate is charged with cruel and bitter criticism. Each side demands attention and is convinced their opinions are the only right ones. This comes from years of abuse from both sides. Sometimes this feuding boils over and the results are always hurtful and sad.

Check your hearts, sisters. You can have a political opinion. In fact, I encourage you to read up and exercise your right to vote. Be informed. Even share your knowledge with others IN A RESPECTFUL WAY. But name calling and threats render your opinion impotent to a world that desperately needs truth spoken in love.

Read Ephesians 4:15. Write it here:

Let’s return to our story. The excitement and drama is heating up. Haman is on a murderous campaign. Let’s just call it “Mordecai – Dead Man Walking”.

DAY ONE – Evil in high places

As we read in Esther 3:1,2 last week, Haman received a huge promotion from King Xerxes. Of all the nobles, Haman was the top of the heap.

Haman decided to take his new-found position out for a test drive. His insatiable appetite for glory and adoration rivals that of the self-absorbed King Xerxes.

After Haman's honoring (3:1) all the other royal officials bowed to him (verse 2). Well, all except the one guy he wanted to humble more than all the rest – Mordecai.

As far as Haman was concerned, this was just another nail in the Mordecai coffin. But he knew he would need some bigger guns to pull this off. The only guns bigger than Haman was King Xerxes. Being pompous himself, Haman KNEW exactly how to get what he wanted from Xerxes. He used flattery.

Read 3:8-11

The best way to sway people is to convince them that 1) you have their best interests at heart, and 2) they will be better off with _____ (whatever you happen to be selling).

My son, Jonathan, is a born salesman. Trust me on this, I raised him. 😊 He works in the automotive industry as a front desk salesman. He is the guy that has the car evaluated and writes the estimate that recaps repairs needed. He is ethical and NEVER sells bogus repairs. But make no mistake, he does convince the customer that everything wrong with their automobile must be fixed immediately. He uses humor and fast talk. He works them like a fine baker kneads dough until it rises to peak perfection. By the time Jonathan is done with them, they are basically thanking him for saving their lives!

Haman knew how to work Xerxes, too.

How did Haman convince King Xerxes to kill all the Jews in the province?

Did Xerxes know that his new queen, that he loved so much, was a Jew? (You have to go back to Chapter 2, 10 for this answer.)

Verse 9 was the icing on the Xerxes cake that Haman was baking. "If it pleases the king..." Sure sure. Like Xerxes had even given these Jews a passing thought before this. Just to seal the deal, Haman put his money where his angry mouth was. He put up 10,000 talents of silver (verse 9b). This was about 375 tons (yes, I said tons) of silver.

Where would Haman get that kind of loot? Well, with the Jews being killed and pillaged, he could easily collect this blood money and probably still have some leftover for his personal treasury.

But Xerxes let him off the hook for the money (verse 11). In fact, we get a hint of Xerxes' compliancy regarding the Jews in verse 11b.

What did Xerxes say about the Jews in this verse?

With Haman in possession of the king's powerful signet ring, he could exterminate the Jews. Basically, King Xerxes had given Haman complete power. The saying "with great power comes great responsibility" did not enter into Haman's mind. Drunk with power, he was letting his rage at Mordecai fuel his life and subsequent actions.

Do you see a pattern of bad decisions from these two men? Xerxes also had a way of being talked into bad decisions. Name them:

Do you have a pattern in your life of poor choices? Confess this weakness to God and pray for His wisdom the next time a "Haman" whispers in your ear "If it pleases the king.....".

DAY TWO – Rise up to your destiny

Glowing with this abundance of power, Haman pulled out all the stops and got the royal secretaries to work. They didn't have email or even snail mail. So, each order had to be handwritten. Plus, there were various languages within the 127 provinces.

Haman is on the rampage and King Xerxes is duped into helping him destroy the Jews in the land. The city of Susa was reeling with the sudden turn of events (Chapter 3, verse 15).

Then Mordecai re-enters the story.

Read Chapter 4

Mordecai learned of the plot and immediately went into mourning. How did he express his grief? (verse 1)

How did Esther learn of her cousin Mordecai's behavior? (verse 4)

Living in the palace was probably an easy life, but a sequestered one. It's not like Esther could turn on Fox News and learn about the events of the day. Everyone in the provinces (especially the Jews) knew what was going to happen to them. But not Esther.

We are responsible for what we know and what we have responsibility over. Remember the parable of the wise servant in Luke 12:43-48? The key verse is in 48b. Fill in the blanks below (I used the NIV version):

"From _____ who has been given _____, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been _____, _____, much more will be _____."

Now we come to the part of the story where Esther rises up to her true calling. She was not just another pretty (well, let's face it...gorgeous) face. Once she learned the plight of her people, she had to do something. What did Mordecai ask her to do (through Hathach, her attendant)? (verse 8)

Esther knew she could die in fulfilling Mordecai's request. Yet she courageously rose up. Her words are in Chapter 4, verses 15-16. Write verse 16 here:

Esther had found her purpose. She knew she had to seize the day and act on behalf of her people, the Jews. This required bravery, selfless behavior, and wisdom from God. Esther counted the costs and moved ahead anyway.

I remember 9/11/01. This terrorist attack on American soil rocked our nation. But what I remember most is those that made it out of the Twin Towers building recounting how rescue workers were heading INTO the building when the victims were desperately heading OUT. What kind of person does that? The Esther kind.

As we close our study for today, ponder for a moment about God's purpose in your life.

What do you think God wants to do through you?

How has your life, up to now, contributed to that purpose?

What are you willing to sacrifice to fulfill that purpose?

Ladies, know that God has placed us all in positions *"for such a time as this"*. Pray for courage, fast for God's wisdom, and rise up to your calling. You are the beauty queen on the stage of life with everyone watching, including God.

"For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him." (2 Chronicles 16:9)

DAY THREE – Retaliation

Esther is on a quest to save her people. But she wisely planned her steps. Some situations call for an immediate response. But sometimes we should take a breath and make a plan. And that is precisely what Esther did.

As a review, what was the most important preparation step Esther took?
(Ch. 4, verse 16)

Fasting and waiting on God is hard, especially when the trial is moving forward like a charging bull. But those three days of fasting were vital to calm their fears and re-focus their perspective. Fasting and prayer also, according to Isaiah 40:31, gives us strength.

Write Isaiah 40:31 here:

With a renewed spirit after the fast, Esther devised a plan. She decided to throw a party. WHAT? Death and destruction were imminent and she wants to party?

Here's where "knowing your audience" is important. Esther's goals were:

1. To not get killed by Xerxes for seeing him unannounced
2. To ask Xerxes for a favor
3. To request that Xerxes kill his second in command

To achieve these objectives would require strategy and careful presentation. She knew her king/husband liked parties. A party was how Esther got to her current position as queen.

She also knew Xerxes was COMPLETELY smitten with her. A little teasing, a little mystery, and Esther would have Xerxes eating out of her hand. Oh yes, Esther knew her audience!

Read Esther 5:9-14

But before Esther could get her party on the books, there was another evil interlude.

Haman was riding high with his new power, but because he was self-absorbed, it only took one encounter with Mordecai to bring him down. Haman went home in a full-blown pout. Zeresh, his wife, whom I think had

heard quite enough of Haman's whining, suggested a solution. Haman should build a gallows to hang Mordecai. And not just ANY gallows.

According to Esther 5:14, how tall was this gallows? _____

Haman went to work immediately and built a gallows so tall that Mordecai's death would be known throughout the land. At least that was his plan.

Providence, once again, appears in our story. What happened to King Xerxes in Chapter 6:1?

Such a seemingly insignificant incident like insomnia played greatly in the plan of God. Because of time restraints, let's just recap it here:

- *Xerxes couldn't sleep
- *he was reminded about Mordecai saving his life
- *he realized Mordecai hadn't received any honor for this act
- *Xerxes asked Haman to be in charge of honoring Mordecai

Sweet irony!

DAY FOUR - Retaliation

Esther's party was a two-day affair (7:2). The king was feeling especially amiable toward his beautiful queen. But it took a deadly turn when Esther 1) revealed that she was Jewish, and 2) that Haman wanted all Jews destroyed.

King Xerxes was enraged. Haman pathetically tried to make excuses, then beg for mercy; mercy, by the way, that he had no intention of extending to Mordecai or the Jews. Justice was poetically served when Xerxes had Haman hanged on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordecai.

If we had gone with the circumstances as they appeared, Mordecai would have been hanged and the Jews destroyed. But God isn't affected by circumstances.

We need to pause here a moment and repeat a phrase we learned in Lesson #1:

GOD IS ALWAYS PRESENT AND ALWAYS IN CONTROL.

Now just because Haman was dead didn't mean the issue of Jewish annihilation wasn't still looming. Remember this edict was sealed with the king's ring. This made it irreversible.

But now who had possession of the king's powerful ring? (8:2) _____

So, they called back the royal secretaries to compose a NEW order. It was the same process Haman used before. But, even though they couldn't reverse Haman's death crusade, they allowed the Jews to retaliate. This was their salvation.

Turn to Habakkuk 3:17-19

Habakkuk wrote this book to encourage the people of Judah (and himself) that God is still in control of the world despite the apparent triumph of evil. Verse 17 lists some pretty severe scenarios. List them below:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

I'm sure after you read these verses, and then listed them, you are saying "I'm not a farmer and I don't have any livestock. So, these disasters mean nothing to me." Remember the time and people Habakkuk was addressing. This basically says "Even if there is no food and no money, I will still trust You."

This thought is recapped in Job 13:15. Write it below:

With the new edict the Jews were given the right to assemble and protect themselves (8:11). Just when they thought that there was no way out, that their fate was sealed by a murderous Haman, and that they were sitting ducks, a courier arrived with a new edict.

We can compare this with our sinful lives. The bible tells us we were "dead in our sins" (Romans 6:11a) but because of Jesus Christ we are "alive to God" (Romans 6:11b) Just when there seemed to be no hope for mankind, Jesus arrived on earth with a new edict – salvation through His blood! Praise God!

As we finish up Day Four, here are a couple of thoughts to remember:

- *Although God is just, He is just in HIS timing.
- *Just because God is silent, doesn't mean He's not present.
- *When all seems lost, it's not.

DAY FIVE – Finish the job, then celebrate

The fateful day arrived – the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar. The raiding parties were assembled, ready to kill and plunder the Jews. But the Jews were ready also. They had royal permission to not only fight back, but to plunder those who tried to harm them.

But an interesting development occurred.

Read 9:10b and 9:16b. What do both of these two verses say?

After months of worrying and being fearful, one might be inclined to take liberties with their newfound royal backing. They had permission to not only kill, but plunder. The Jews showed amazing self-control. They only protected themselves. They did not retaliate.

Self-control is a trait sorely lacking in society today. It is listed as one of the Fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. Yet this fruit is scarce.

Chuck Swindoll describes self-control as:

"Those who have mastery over their inner desires, whether those desires are sensual or emotional. Self-control is the key that unlocks the leg irons of slavery – slavery to those drives and desires that initially seem to be so freeing and fulfilling. Self-control is to a person what brakes are to a car. Without it, a crash is inevitable."

Have you ever felt justified in verbally “punching” someone who has hurt you? Or have you smiled (wickedly) when someone you felt was bad or undeserving got what (you felt) was coming to them? These feelings, although natural, are a result of our sin nature. And it’s not pleasing to God.

Joseph was a good example of restraint instead of retaliation in Genesis 42-45. Those brothers of his deserved whatever retaliation they received from Joseph. And Joseph was in a good position to dish it out to them. But instead he wept loudly because he was so glad to see them.

Jesus is the best example of restraint. He was loving, yet was treated hatefully. He was giving, yet He received nothing in return. He was perfect, yet He bore our sins to give us eternal life. Jesus could have destroyed the earth and would have been justified. But, praise God, He chose self-control over the justice of retaliation.

The temporary pleasure of retaliation is just that – temporary. As a believer we are called to be different. We are called to self-control, restraint, and forgiveness. We are called to be like Christ.

The first 16 verses of chapter 9 described the two-day battle and who was killed. That list did NOT include any Jews. Then an interesting footnote comes in verse 17. Write it here:

When they finished the job, they rested and feasted. They celebrated! They even gave each other presents. After a hard trial, we sometimes forget to relax and celebrate when it’s finally over.

At the time of the writing, I read that earth had lost a dear sister that gained heavenly status – Luci Swindoll. She just had a way, with her twinkling eyes and infectious laugh, to create a party wherever she went. She celebrated life all the time. In one of her books Luci wrote:

“The highest and most desirable state of the soul is to praise God in celebration for being alive....Our poor, splendid souls! How they fight for food! They have forgotten how to celebrate. They have forgotten how to request little perks. Our hurried, stressful, busy lives are unquestionably the most dangerous enemy of celebrating life itself....life is a happy thing, a festival to be enjoyed rather than a drudgery to be endured. Life is full of

perks if we train our souls to perceive them...a thousand tiny things from which one can weave a bright necklace of little pleasures for one's life."

The Jews in the 127 provinces under the rule of King Xerxes had mastered the concept Luci Swindoll was trying to teach us today. Finish the job, then celebrate.

In fact, Jewish people still celebrate Purim today. They gather to hear the reading of the Book of Esther and participate in the story by booing and hissing every time the name Haman is read, and they cheer whenever Mordecai's name is mentioned.

Instead of looking at this time in their past as an almost annihilation of their people, they celebrate the victory and have a party.

Celebrate sisters! If you are in the middle of a long trial – celebrate continued strength. Don't whine and moan about circumstances – celebrate that you serve a God that is not bound by circumstances. The point is to be grateful. Every breath you breathe, every day you live is a reason to give thanks.

WRAPPING IT UP:

In this story, we have seen God work through a pagan king, place a Jewish girl as queen, replace royal personnel to fit His plan, and protect an entire nation of people. All the while His name is never mentioned. And yet every detail shows God's power.

Providence is displayed in every word of this book. Remember we learned from Lesson #1 that "providence means that the hand of God is in the glove of human events." Have you allowed God to work like that in your life?

I pray you have been encouraged by Esther. I pray you have been emboldened by the story of how God used her life. I pray that you will celebrate the victories. I pray you will have courage to serve.

"Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory...forever and ever! Amen." (Ephesians 3: 20,21)

Amen! Amen! Amen!

That said, I remain, Sheryl aka all 'round good egg