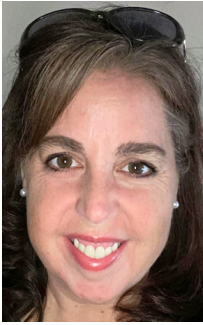


Bible Studies for Life: August 18

Haman • Esther 3:1-9; 6:10-14

By Jessica McMillan



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A Jew (Esther) married to a pagan (Xerxes) entering a harem

has drawn raised eyebrows from Bible readers for centuries. In this book, we read of a lifestyle of lavishness and debauchery, yet there is no mention of God, and no New Testament writer references the story. Where does it fit in the God story?

Esther, who hid her ethnicity, had been chosen as a replacement when Queen Vashti refused to appear before the king and his buddies at a banquet. An orphan, Esther had been adopted and raised by her cousin Mordecai, who daily sat at the king's gate to keep an eye on Esther as best he could. The king's second-in-command was Haman, and Mordecai refused the custom to bow to him as he passed by. Haman learned that Mordecai was a Jew and became so filled with rage that he decided to kill Mordecai and all his people, too. Mordecai overheard the plot to kill the Jews and passed on the information to Esther, who eventually mentioned it to her husband, and the plot was foiled. There's much more to the story, but for this week's lesson, there are several things that stand out.

Esther 3:1-5

When King Xerxes honored Haman by making him second in command, he accepted the role with pride and arrogance. Day by day, as Haman processed through the gate, the royal officials and others would bow in his presence. Haman enjoyed the attention, and it only fed his hunger for power. Proverbs 16:18 reminds us that "pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall" (NIV). As the villain in the story, Haman is a direct illustration that arrogance and pride lead to destruction.

Esther 3:6-9

Even in modern culture, we see that people who oppose biblical values often use logical arguments to sway public opinion. Haman did this as he told the king about "a certain people

dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them" (v.8 NIV). By using a combination of truth mixed with untruth and exaggeration, Haman was able to convince the king that his plan was in the best interest of the kingdom. This section of the passage is where it begins to become clear that Esther had come into the kingdom for a specific reason: to save the Jewish people from certain death.

Esther 6:10-14

In the first verses of chapter 6, we find Haman having set up some gallows for Mordecai to be hung. In verse 6, he asked the king, "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?" Thinking of himself as the man the king would surely want to honor, he was mortified to find that Mordecai was to be the recipient of all the wonderful benefits Haman had planned for himself. Imagine the humiliation as he was compelled to parade Mordecai through the city streets as the man the king wanted to honor. The story tells us that Haman's humiliation did not end there, because he was ultimately killed on the very gallows he built for Mordecai.

There are many insights to be gleaned from this story. Haman's quest for power ultimately led to his own destruction. He took advantage of his position for what he perceived would be his own personal gain. But the overarching truth from the book of Esther is that no one can outsmart God's providence. Haman did not know God nor understand His power. We can trust that God is active in the lives of His people, even when it does not seem like it.

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