

Bible Stories

ESTHER

ROMANS 8:28

April 22, 2023

The book of Esther is a true narrative.

The story begins in the third year of Xerxes the Great (Ahasuerus), who was King of Persia from 486-465 BC.

Xerxes threw a 6-month long feast to honor the officials, princes and nobles that made up the vast Persian Empire.

At the conclusion of this massive feast, he threw another, 7-day feast, for the people living in the capital city of Shushan (Susa).

It was at this feast – **“when his heart was merry with wine”** – that Xerxes decided all the partygoers should meet the queen – Vashti – and see her new crown, **“for she was beautiful to behold.”** Some commentators suggest that what the king was asking her to wear was her crown and **ONLY** her crown.

Well, Vashti said no. She disobeyed! Her refusal to appear before the drunken king and his drunken friends was interpreted as an act of rebellion.

The furious king asked his closest advisors, Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memucan, if there were any potential legal consequence for her actions.

“Here’s the deal,” they told him. **“If Vashti gets away with this, all the wives in the realm will think that they, too, are allowed to disobey their husbands. Therefore, our advice to you is that Vashti be banished. Giving notice to all the wives that they better obey their husbands.”**

Vashti was banished and a decree, emphasizing male headship over the family, was sent to all 127 provinces.

Time went by. Xerxes began to miss Vashti, but once a law was made it was permanent. But he was lonely, so it was suggested that the palace hold a beauty contest. All the beautiful virgins from throughout the empire would be brought to Susa. After 12 months of preparation, each girl would go before the king. The **“winner”** would become the next queen.

Enter Mordecai the Jew – lawyer extraordinaire. Mordecai was of the tribe of Benjamin, but he had been born in Persia.

Scripture does not tell us if Mordecai was married, but we know he had an adopted daughter, his cousin, Hadassah, whom he had adopted after her parents died.

Hadassah was a beautiful girl and eventually she, too, was taken to the king’s palace.

Mordecai understood that a high position did not mean the absence of prejudice, so before Hadassah went to the palace, he warned her not to reveal the truth of her nationality.

Hadassah arrived at the palace – forced to give up the only life she had ever known. No doubt this would have been an overwhelming and frightening experience for the young girl, but scripture tells us that she conducted herself in such a way that she impressed the harem overseer. Hadassah, now Esther, was given 7 maidservants and moved into her own apartment.

One year later, Esther went into the king ---- and the he loved her more than all the other women. He set the royal crown on her head and made her queen in Vashti’s place.

One day, while Mordecai was sitting at the king’s gate, he discovered a plot against Xerxes. He got word to Esther, who informed the king.

The conspirators were executed.

The event was recorded, but no reward was given - this will prove to be an important omission.

Now our story reveals the villain – Haman, son of Hammedatha, the Agagite.

Xerxes gave him a promotion, establishing his authority over all the princes. Haman now looked down on everyone, believing all *“the lessers”* should bow to him. Everyone did..... except Mordecai – he simply refused to bow!

As an Agagite, Haman’s disdain for the Jews had a deep history, but his hatred was personal and its focus was Mordecai. So, Haman hatched a plan to do away with Mordecai and while he was at it, the Jews.

At the beginning of Xerxes 12th year on the throne, Haman cast lots, until the 13th of Adar (**March 7**) was chosen – Esther 3:7.

Haman went before the king and reported that there was a group of people who did not keep the king’s laws. He then suggested that a law be written decreeing this group’s destruction. Haman even offered to pay the reward out of his own pocket - effectively putting a hit out on an entire nation.

The king asked no questions. Instead, he handed over his signet ring and told Haman to do with the people as he saw fit.

A decree stating that, *“on 13th day of the month of Adar, all the Jews, both young and old, men and women and children are to be destroyed, killed and annihilated and all their possessions plundered.”* was sent to the all the provinces within the empire – from Egypt to India.

Mordecai and all the Jews of Susa tore their clothes in grief and put ashes on their heads.

Esther, unaware of the decree, sent word to Mordecai to find out why he was in mourning.

Mordecai gave her messenger a copy of the decree to show Esther along with a request, *“go before the king and plead for your people.”*

Uh Oh!!! Esther had not been called into the king for a month and no one could go into his presence without being summoned. Unless the king extended his scepter, she would die.

Esther found herself in a no-win situation. To go to the king unsummoned might result in her death, but her silence would mean the absolute destruction of her people. She was just a woman – one of many. The law could not be changed, so, what could she possibly do? Maybe, if she just kept quiet, she would survive.....

Esther sent a message to Mordecai – *“there is nothing I can do.”*

Mordecai’s message came back – *“Do not imagine that you will escape just because you live in the king's palace. If you remain silent, deliverance for the Jews will come from someplace else, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows.... Maybe you have become queen for such a time as this?”*

Deep breath.... *“Go, assemble all the Jews in Susa, and fast for me for 3 days. I and my maidens will do the same. After 3 days, I will go in to the king, which is not permitted by law. If I perish, I perish.”*

On the third day, Esther put on her very best outfit and made her way to king. There he sat on the throne, the most powerful man in her world. How would he respond to her boldness? Scripture tells us that when he saw her, he extended his scepter.... One hurdle down.

But the king was curious. What could be so important that she would risk death?

Esther: *I’m preparing a banquet and I’d like you and Haman to join me.*

At dinner the king asked Esther again what could be so important, *“whatever it is I grant it, even to half my kingdom.....”*

Esther played coy, inviting the king and Haman to another banquet the next evening, promising to make her request known at that time.

Haman left the banquet flush with pride. But as he made his way home, he saw the dreaded Mordecai and his mood changed. Once home, his wife and family suggested he simply have Mordecai killed – I mean why wait until March?

Haman immediately hired a contractor to construct gallows in his backyard.

While construction was going on over at Haman’s, the king was having trouble sleeping. He requested a review of court history. He was reminded of the failed attempt on his life and he asked if a reward had been given to the man who had reported the plot. No reward was noted in the record. About that time, in walked Haman to request the life of Mordecai....

King: *Great timing Haman. I have a question.... There is someone I wish to honor. Any thoughts on the reward I should give him?*

“Well,” Haman thought, **“The king can only be talking about one man ---- ME!”**

Haman: *Hmmm.... How about this - Give the man a robe and a crown the king has worn and put him on a horse the king has ridden. Appoint one of the king’s nobles to parade this man through the streets declaring, ‘this is what is done to a man the kings desires to honor.’*

King: *Great idea. Now go and do exactly as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew.*

Wait, what?!

Oh, the embarrassment! All day long having to go street to street, yelling, **“this is what is done to a man the kings desires to honor.”** – for Mordecai!!!

There was no time to dwell on his humiliation, however, because Haman was expected at Esther’s 2nd banquet.

As the banquet began to wind down, the king could wait no longer. **“What is your request?”** he asked Esther.

Esther: *If I have found favor in your sight, O king, I request my life and the life of my people. We have been sold – not as slaves, for that I would not have bothered you – but to be killed. Completely annihilated.*

King: *Who wants to kill you? Who would do such a thing?*

Esther pointed her finger at Haman and said, **“That guy right there!”**

The king stormed out of the room. Meanwhile, Haman, realizing he was in deep trouble, threw himself across Esther, pleading for his life.

The king returned just in time to see this move and in his rage ordered Haman to be taken and executed on the very gallows that had been built for Mordecai.

Esther was safe, but remember, a Persian law could not be changed. The Jews were still in danger, so, the king allowed Esther and Mordecai to write a new law permitting the Jews to defend themselves.

When the appointed day arrived, **“the Jews gathered in their cities in all the provinces to strike against those who sought their destruction, and no one could withstand them, as the fear of them fell on all the people. All the officials of the provinces, the satraps, governors, and those who did the work of the king were supporting the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai had fallen on them.”** Esther 9:2-3

Throughout Jewish history Yahweh had instituted feasts that would remind the people of significant events. Passover, for instance, was to remind Israel of their deliverance from Egypt and point to their future deliverance from sin.

Now the Jews instituted a new feast to celebrate their deliverance from certain annihilation – the Feast of Purim. A feast the Jewish community still celebrates, 2500 years later.

What do we do with this story?

Has there ever been a time in your life when you didn’t understand the circumstances you found yourself in?

We shake our heads and ask, **“Why?”** but rarely do we pull back the curtain to see how God might be working through our circumstances to refine and transform us as He works out His plans and purposes for our lives.

- Joseph did not choose to be sold into slavery and yet God worked through those circumstances to place Joseph exactly where he needed be in order to save Egypt and his family from starvation.
- Daniel and his friends did not choose to be taken from their families and country into an unknown future, and yet, God worked through those circumstance to place those 4 young men exactly where they needed to be and they became extraordinary witnesses to power and love of God.
- Esther did not choose to become the wife of a pagan king and yet God worked through those circumstances to place Esther exactly where she needed to be to save the Jews from annihilation.

God is not done writing our stories. We may not have chosen to be in the circumstances we find ourselves in, but if we hang on - if we choose faith and trust - knowing that if it is not good yet, it’s because God is not done yet, then one day we will see our lives from His vantage point and we’ll understand that he IN DEED worked all things out for our good.

Romans 8:28 - And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.