

Bi235 Old Testament 2

Lesson Bi235-44 Esther Saves Her People

In these lessons, we have learned that God blessed many powerful women in Israel. God used Deborah in the time of the Judges. Jael fought for Israel and killed an enemy commander. Ruth left Moab and committed her life to Naomi and the God of Israel. Hannah prayed for a child, and later her son Samuel became a great judge, priest, and prophet. A widow sheltered Elijah and experienced a miracle of food and an income from the LORD. A Shunammite family took care of Elisha, saw the miraculous birth of a son, and received him back from the dead. But perhaps the most famous woman used by God to save her people was Esther.

The Persian Empire was ruled by Xerxes. In his third year as king, he arranged six months of festivities. He invited officials from all over his empire to display his great wealth and the splendor of his rule. Then he gave a banquet for seven days. While the men were eating and drinking in the palace, Queen Vashti gave a banquet for the women. The king drank too much wine. Then he gave an order that the queen should enter the men's banquet hall to display her great beauty. The queen refused to come, and Xerxes flew into a rage. "According to our laws," the king asked his counselors, "what should I do to the queen? She has disobeyed my command."

One of his counselors replied, "She has dishonored the king, and all the assembled officials as well. Women throughout the empire will hear about it, and they will become bold to dishonor their husbands. There will be no end of disrespect and discord. You should issue a royal decree to banish Vashti from your presence. When women hear what you have done, they will be quick to respect their husbands" (Est 1:4-20). So the king banished Vashti, and the news spread everywhere.

After the king's anger cooled, he felt lonely for Vashti. He decided on a plan to find a new queen. His officials went throughout the empire and brought back to the capital city young, beautiful, unmarried women. They were given special food and beauty treatments for several months. When Xerxes asked to see one of them, she would go to the palace. The king would entertain her for the evening. Then she became part of the king's harem, and did not see him again unless he asked for her by name.

Now Mordecai was taking care of an orphan girl named Esther. He had raised her as his own child. She had become a beautiful young woman, and was selected to be prepared as one of the king's wives. She was a favorite among the women and their overseers. She was a Jewish woman, but didn't talk about it. Mordecai advised her not to reveal her nationality and family background. Every day he walked near the place where the young women lived, to check on Esther.

When Esther's turn came to see the king, the king was pleased with her. He chose her as his new queen but she had still been in the king's harem during the events of the last lesson: the plot to kill the king, Mordecai's information about the plotters, Haman's plan to murder all Jews, Haman's anger against Mordecai, and Mordecai's broken heart.

Esther's attendants told her about Mordecai's grief. She ordered one of them to find out why her beloved father was so upset. The attendant talked with Mordecai, who told him about the bribe Haman had promised the king. Showing him the decree setting the date for the annihilation of all Jews, he asked the messenger to tell Esther everything. He also begged Esther to go to the king and plead with him for the Jewish people.

Esther heard the whole sad story, and sent this message back to Mordecai: “Everyone knows that anyone who approaches Xerxes without being summoned into his presence is killed on the spot. Unless the king extends his royal scepter to me and spares my life, I will die. Xerxes has not asked to see me in over a month.”

Mordecai heard Esther’s message and sent her this reply: “Do not think that because you are the queen that you alone of all the Jews will escape. If you remain silent, deliverance for the Jews will come from another place, but you and the rest of your family will die. Who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”

Esther sent back another message: “Gather the Jews in the city, fast and pray for me for three days. Then I’ll go to see the king, though it’s against the law. And if I perish, I perish” (Est 4:4-17).

Esther dressed in her finest robe and went into the palace. When the king saw her, he was pleased, and extended to her the royal scepter. “What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? I’ll give you almost anything you ask,” he said.

“If it pleases the king,” replied Esther, “let the king and Haman come to a dinner I have prepared today.”

“Bring Haman at once,” ordered the king to his servant, “so we may do what the queen asks.” At dinner the king again asked Esther why she had come to see him.

“There is something I want to ask you,” said Esther. “I’ll prepare another banquet for you and Haman tomorrow, and then I’ll make my request.”

Haman left the dinner, happy to be included. He walked by Mordecai, however, and got mad when Mordecai refused to bow to him. He went home angry. He bragged to his wife and friends about all his honors, wealth, children, and high position. He bragged about his dinner with the king and queen. “But all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king’s gate.” His wife and friends advised him to set up gallows, and to ask permission from the king to have Mordecai hung on it. So Haman had the gallows set up (Est 5:1-14).

That night the king couldn’t sleep. He asked for court records to be brought in and read to him. He heard the record of the plot against him and how Mordecai had saved his life. “How has Mordecai been rewarded for his faithfulness?” the king asked. They told him nothing had been done for him.

In the morning Haman came to ask permission to have Mordecai hung. The king asked Haman, “What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?”

Haman thought the king was referring to him, so he said, “You should give him one of your royal robes and a royal horse, and lead him through the city. Shout to all, ‘We’re doing this for the man the king delights to honor!’”

The king commanded Haman, “Go at once! Do what you suggest for Mordecai the Jew!” Haman obeyed the king, and led Mordecai through the city and proclaimed, “We’re doing this for the man the king delights to honor!” But Haman was shocked. He went home, and told his wife and friends what had happened (Est 6:1-13).

Suddenly it was time for Esther's banquet. At the banquet the king repeated his question to the queen. "This is my request," Esther replied, "Spare my life! Spare the lives of my people! I and my people have been sold to be destroyed—not just sold as slaves, which would be bad enough."

King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, "Who is he? Where is he—the man who has dared to do such a thing?"

Esther pointed and said, "Here is our adversary and enemy! This vile Haman!"

Haman was terrified, and Xerxes was angry. Haman begged Esther for his life, but the king made his decision. An attendant told Xerxes that Haman had set up gallows to hang Mordecai. The king said, "Hang Haman on it!" (Est 7:1-10). Haman was executed and his estate given to Esther. The king permitted Mordecai to issue another decree in his name. This decree went to every corner of the empire and gave the Jewish people the right to defend themselves. On the 13th day of the last month many enemies tried to attack the Jews, but they defended themselves. To this day Jewish people celebrate Purim, named after Haman's choice of the 13th day of the month of Adar.

The Bible has many examples of secret sins that finally become known and punished. David's adultery with Bathsheba is a well-known story. Haman's secret plot was exposed by Esther's courage. John, the disciple of Jesus, instructs all believers, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1John 1:8-9).

This story is **important** because it shows how God rescued the Jewish people through the bravery of Mordecai and Esther. Secret pride and secret sin is seen by God. Even if it is never revealed in this life, people will have to account for it before him one day.

The **main truth** of this lesson is Jewish people throughout the empire were threatened because of the offended pride of one powerful man. God was preparing Mordecai and Esther to be agents of deliverance for God's people.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. How did Esther become the Queen? [Pause]
 - A. If you said, "She was beautiful, but also popular with the other young women and their overseers for her pleasing personality," you are correct.
2. How did Mordecai persuade Esther to ask the king to spare her and the Jewish people? [Pause]
 - A. If you said, "He reminded her of her Jewish heritage and her opportunity to influence the king as his queen, or she too would die," you are right.
3. How do we know that Esther was clever and brave? [Pause]
 - A. If you said, "She risked approaching the king without his prior permission, and she invited the king and Haman to two banquets to show her respect and gain their favor. When the time was right, she exposed Haman as a murderer," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it at least three times. As you hear the story each time, imagine how it happened. See the events in your own mind. Then listen to the story again and share it with someone who has never heard of Esther. Memorize this verse: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1John 1:8-9).