

Sunday School Lesson for April 19,2020

Good morning, I hope you are well and blessed.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, *we praise you for your great strength, and love.* Through your goodness, we are alive and healthy enough to worship you. We praise you for all that you have given us and thank you in Jesus' name. *We confess our need for you and we ask that you renew our hearts, minds, and lives, for the days ahead. God, keep us focused on what is pure and right and give us the power to be obedient to your word. Lord, we ask that you bring healing mercies to our church families, our friends and neighbors that are going through sickness and battling ailments. You know our burdens and we pray for help so we can overcome them. Father, only you can stop the spread of the virus that is plaguing the world, we pray that you end the spreading of the disease and heal the ones that are affected. We ask for your mercy and strength, for the families that have lost love ones. We pray Lord that you, will protect all personnel in the medical community as they continue to care for the sick. We pray for our national, state, and civic leaders asking that you, will give them the wisdom to know what to do as they lead in this time.*

God we ask that you heal us and gives us the courage to worship, and praise you, always putting you first. We ask all these things in our Lord and Savior name, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Lesson for April 19, 2020 is "Injustice Will Be Punished" Scripture is from Esther chapter 7:1-10.

Sources used for this lesson: The Bible, The Bible Knowledge Commentary by John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, The Present Word Adult Bible Lessons and The National Jewish Outreach Program.

The book of Esther does not mention God's name in any chapter. Several events took place which resulted in tens of thousands of Jews being saved from execution. As a result, the book of Esther is the central story commemorated each year during the Jewish Festival of Purim. Even though God is not specifically mentioned in Esther the impression is that He is at work in the background, controlling the events and the outcome. Esther probably had no idea that she would become Queen in the

future just as many of us have no idea how God will use us to accomplish His will.

Background information: The events in the Book of Esther extend over a decade (from 483 B.C. to 473 B.C.). The book takes place in the Persian period after many Israelites had returned from Exile to the land of Palestine to rebuild the temple and set up the sacrificial system. Many Israelite captives, chose not to return to their homeland, even though Isaiah and Jeremiah had urged the yet-to-be-exiled nation to come out of Babylon. Esther is the only book of the Bible in which the name of God is not mentioned, nor are any of the characters depicted praying or worshipping. The New Testament does not quote from the Book of Esther, nor have copies of it been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Law is never mentioned in the book nor are sacrifices or offerings referred to. Prayer is never mentioned in the book, though fasting is. In both books Ezra and Nehemiah, prayer is important to the main characters. In book of Esther nothing is said about Mordecai or Esther praying.

The book gives no hint of who wrote Esther, but the writer knew the Persian culture well. Scholars believe whoever wrote the book had the marks of a person who was there, for he described the events as an eyewitness and the person was probably a Jew.

The Book of Esther was written to encourage the returned Jewish exiles by reminding them of the faithfulness of God who would keep His promises to the nation. The author was also explaining how the Feast of Purim began. The Feast of Purim is celebrated to this day in Orthodox Judaism and among many Messianic Jews. It is also known as the Feast of Lots or, in the more modern culture as the Feast of Esther. Unlike the other major Feasts of the Old Testament, the Feast of Purim is not found in Leviticus chapter 23. The Feast of Purim is recorded only in the book of Esther.

The Present Word lesson states that the story of, "Esther is a beautiful reminder that God sees and takes note of the schemes of wicked people, such as Haman and that there will be indeed be recompense, in God's timing, for those who practice evil."

King Xerxes has an elaborate place in Persepolis as well as a winter citadel (palace) in Susa. King Xerxes was Persia's fifth king (486-465 B.C.). Persia was a world power, and the king, as the center of that power was one of the wealthiest people in the world. In the third year of his reign he gave a 180 day banquet (180 days/6 months) to which he invited his nobles and officials as well as military leaders, princes, and nobles of the provinces. Xerxes ruled over 127 provinces from India to Cush. At the end of the 180 days

banquet Xerxes gave another banquet, that lasted seven days. The feast was livened by the fact that any of the guests could drink as much or as little as he desired. While Xerxes was giving his banquets Queen Vashti was giving a separate banquet for the women. Separate banquets were normal in that culture.

In chapter 1 the Queen Vashti is deposed by the King Xerxes. King Xerxes told his seven eunuchs to bring Queen Vashti into his banquet hall so that her beauty could be admired by the male guests. Vashti refused to come. We are not told why Vashti refused to come. The king consulted wise men about what he should do. The crime the queen committed, was that she disobeyed a command of the king. Memucan, one of King Xerxes' wise men suggested that he have queen deposed so that other nobles of the empire would not follow Queen Vashti's example and despise their husbands and the empire be filled with female disrespect and marital discord. The idea pleased the king and his nobles, so an edict was sent throughout the empire in various languages stating that every man should be ruler over his own household. After the anger of the king subsided, he realized that he had been foolish in his actions. It was suggested to the king that beautiful young virgins (unmarried women) be brought to Susa and given beauty treatments and then the king be allowed to pick from them a woman to replace Queen Vashti. The king liked the idea and followed it.

"There was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin, king of Judah. Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This girl, who was also known as Esther, was lovely in form and features, and Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother had died."(Esther 2:5-7)

Mordecai, was considered one of the greatest Torah leaders of his generation and the Jews in exile looked to him for guidance. When they came to take Esther to the palace, Mordecai, instructs her not to reveal that she is a Jew or who her family is.

The King meets Esther after a year's worth of beauty preparation with fine perfumes, oils, and cosmetics. The text says, that she found great favor with the King, he fell in love, she was more beautiful than all of the other girls in the harem and He made her his Queen.

Mordecai does not reveal his relationship to the new queen, he frequents the palace gates to hear news of Esther's well being. One day he overhears two

men plotting to murder the king and he quickly sends word to Esther, who reveals the plot to the king in the name of Mordecai. The plotters are caught and hanged, and Mordecai's name and deed are written in the king's Book of Chronicles.

After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles. All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this. Mordecai would not kneel down or pay Haman honor. The royal officials ask Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's command?" Day after day they spoke to him but he refused to comply. They told Haman about it to see whether Mordecai's behavior would be tolerated, for he had told them he was a Jew. Haman was enraged and looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of King Xerxes.

Haman developed a plan. He goes to the King and tricks him into giving him permission to eradicate the Jews living in his kingdom. Haman tells the King that he will rid the kingdom of a pesky group of people who refuse to pay homage to the king and his court. The king agrees, not knowing that his new queen (Esther) is a Jew and issues an edict to all 127 provinces saying that on the 13th of Adar, the Jews in all the provinces are to be exterminated and their property kept as plunder.

When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. He sent word to Esther that she must go to the king and stop this horrible decree from becoming reality. Esther, however, was afraid to approach the king. It is known that anyone who approaches the king without being summoned faces the chance of death.

But Mordecai sees the bigger picture and tells Esther "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:13-14)

Esther agrees to go to the king but she first asks Mordechai to request all the Jews to fast for three days and her maids would fast as Mordecai did.

On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. Seeing the beautiful queen, the king holds out his golden scepter, a sign that she is welcome in his court, and

offers to grant her any request. Esther requests only that King Xerxes and Haman join her for a banquet. Pleased at her minimal request, which shows him that she was a wise choice as queen, the King agrees. Haman is summoned and the three dine together. At the end of the feast, the king once again tells her to ask whatever she would of him and she only requests that the king and Haman join her for a second feast on the following day, then she would answer the king's question.

After the private feast, Haman sets out for his home well pleased with the great favor shown to him by the queen. On his way, however, he passes Mordecai, who once again refuses to bow, reigniting Haman's fury. By the time Haman reaches his home, he is crazed with anger at Mordecai's refusal to bow – after all, he is Haman, second to the king and so beloved even by the queen.

He tells his wife, Zeresh, and his gathered friends "Even Queen Esther did not bring anyone else with the king except me, to the feast she prepared, and tomorrow as well, I am invited to her feast with the king. All this is worth nothing to me, every time I see Mordechai the Jew sitting at the king's gate!"(Esther 5:12-13). Zeresh, who equals her husband in wickedness, suggests that Haman immediately build a gallows, seventy-five feet high and ask the king to have Mordecai hung on it.

That night the king could not sleep, so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, be brought in and read to him. As they read, they recount the story of Mordecai destroying the plot on the king's life. The king realizes that he had never properly honored Mordecai for this.

Later Haman, the man who had tricked the king into giving him permission to destroy the Jews, comes into the court and the King asks him what should be done for a man who has brought honor to the king. Haman thought to himself, "Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?" Haman's pride speaks for him and he tells the king that man should be paraded in the king's robe through town.

King Xerxes tells him to do this for Mordecai who saved his life, and Haman does as he is told. Haman goes home and tells everyone in his family what has happened and they tell him certainly he cannot follow through on his plan. While Haman was still talking with his advisers and his wife Zeresh, the king eunuchs arrived and hurried Haman away to the banquet Esther had prepared. The king and Haman went to dine with Esther and while they were drinking wine the king again asked, "Queen Esther what is your petition? It will be given to you. What is your request?" Queen Esther answered, "If I

have found favor with you, O king, and it please your majesty, grant me my life – this is my petition. And spare my people – this is my request.

Esther told the king that her and her people had been sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation. When the king found out that Haman was planning this, the king left in a rage and went into the palace garden. When the king return to the banquet hall he saw Haman falling on the couch where Esther was reclining. The king exclaimed, "Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?" (Esther 7:8)

After the words left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face and Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king said, "A gallows seventy-five high stands by Haman's house. He had it made for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king. The king said, "Hang him on it." So Haman was hanged on the gallows.

The same day King Xerxes gave Queen Esther the estates of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. Mordecai came into the presence of the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her. Esther appointed Mordecai over the Haman's estate. Esther appeared before the king a second time without an invitation. This time she begged him to put an end to the evil plan which was in effect because of Haman.

The king was favorable toward her and once held out the gold scepter to her. King Xerxes replied to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, "because Haman attacked the Jews, I have given his estate to Esther, and they have hanged him on the gallows. Now write another decree in the king's name in behalf of the Jews as seems best to you, and seal it with the king's signet ring, for no document written in the king's name and sealed can be revoked." A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.

From the section, Stepping into the World: At the end of Esther, you read about the establishment of a new holiday, called Purim, to celebrate the Jewish people.

On the 13th day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, the Jews successfully defeat their enemies throughout the provinces. The ten sons of Haman are killed and their bodies are hanged publicly. In the citadel of Susa, the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men. But they did not lay their hands on the plunder. Meanwhile, the remainder of the Jews who were in the king's provinces also assembled to protect themselves and get relief from their enemies. They killed seventy-five thousand of them but did not

lay their hands on the plunder. This happened on the thirteenth day of Adar, and on the fourteenth they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy.

The Jews in Susa, however, had assembled on the thirteenth and fourteenth, and then on the fifteenth they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy.

Mordecai recorded the events and sent letters to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Xerxes to have them celebrate annually the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar. The two day feast was for remembering the goodness of God working through a number of circumstances to protect his people from extinction.

Esther 9:28 says, "These days should be remembered and observed in every generation by every family, and in every province and in every city. And these days of Purim should never cease to be celebrated by the Jews, nor should the memory of them die out among their descendants."

The Feast of Purim, or lots, is the celebration of the dramatic upheaval of the plans of one particular man to destroy the people of Israel but it is more than the just that. It is the celebration of God's protection and promise to deliver His covenant people. God's hand of protection is upon His children. Even when things look bleak, God is there. Purim is celebrated with great laughter and joy because God has turned our despair into hope! Upon recognizing the enormity of what God had done for them the Israelites burst out in great laughter and joy.

Psalms 126:2-3 says, "Then our mouth were filled with laughter, and our tongue with songs of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them. The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced."

Here are some of the features of this festival: Reading the Megillah (Scroll of Esther), sending gifts of food to family and friends, giving gifts to the poor, making a festival meal (the meal usually included wine), masquerading (a feature of the holiday similar to Mardi Gras or Fasching that precedes Lent, Attending Purim Carnival, Performing a Purim Spiel (Purim Play).

"Easter is the longest, most important celebration on the Christian calendar because, like Purim, it is a feast commemorating our salvation. As the Jews were spared because of Esther's intervention, we have been saved through the intervention of Jesus Christ. Easter is not just a day, it is a fifty day feast."

From the Present Word: "It may seem strange to have a section on prayer from a book of the Bible that never mentions God, And while it is true that no character is depicted as praying to God in this book, we do find insight to prayer. When we come to God in prayer, we believe and confess that God already knows what is on our hearts. When we are specific in our requests, we are not telling God anything, God does not already know. Rather we are helping ourselves: specificity in prayer allows us to "cast our anxiety" on God." (1 Peter 5:7)

Proverbs 26:27 "Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and a stone will come back on the one who starts it rolling."

Let us remember that we serve a God who is present, working out the details; even when disaster seems unavoidable, we should not give up. God is working out the details for our ultimate provision in His mercy and His ultimate glory in the circumstance.

Closing: For the love that cast out fear, the faith that sustains and the hope that never perishes, be with us now and forever more. Amen. God watch over us and take care of us.

Next week's lesson April 26, 2020 "The Lord Loves Justice" from Isaiah 61:8-11 and 62:2-4.