

Haman's Wicked Plot to Kill the Jews

(Esther 3-4)

Introduction

How do you react when someone is mean to you? Do you ever feel like getting back at them? Sometimes when we don't get our way, our feelings can be hurt and we want to take revenge on the other person by hurting them in some way.

Today our lesson is about a man who decided to kill a bunch of people because they hurt his feelings. That is never the way God wants us to react when we get our feelings hurt. God wants us to control our anger and to treat others with love and respect.

Opening Prayer

Father, forgive us for the times that we want to lash back at people who do us wrong. Teach us this morning that You are a loving God who is in control of everything that happens in our lives—even the bad things. Encourage us to be loving and kind to others, even when they do wrong things to us. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.
(Matthew 5:44 NIV)*

Lesson

Last week we began a study in the book of Esther. We learned that although Esther's parents died when she was a girl and left her as an orphan, she became the Queen of Persia through some very unusual circumstances.

After Queen Vashti refused to attend a banquet, God allowed Esther to gain the king's favor and King Xerxes chose Esther as his queen. As an orphan, Esther had no idea that God was going to raise her up to a position of power and authority. But He had plans to use Esther to save His people from doom.

We learned that no matter what kind of curves life throws at you, God is able to accomplish His will in your life if you are willing to follow Him. You can trust that He has a plan and a purpose for your life.

We pick up the story today shortly after Esther had become the queen. One day as Mordecai, Esther's cousin, was on duty at the palace, two of the king's guards became angry at the king and plotted to kill him.

Mordecai heard about it and passed on the information to Queen Esther, who told the king.

Esther 2:23

When an investigation was made and Mordecai's story was found to be true, the two men were impaled on a sharpened pole. This was all recorded in The Book of the History of King Xerxes' Reign.

Mordecai was a hero! He saved the king's life and the two bad guys were hung. But this matter was soon forgotten. But, don't *you* forget about this good deed that Mordecai did, because you will see later that God will use Mordecai's bravery to bring about the salvation of His people.

Meanwhile, the king appointed one of the princes in his empire by the name of Haman to be the prime minister of his kingdom. He became second in command. Only the king himself had more power than Haman.

Esther 3:2

All the king's officials would bow down before Haman to show him respect whenever he passed by, for so the king had commanded. But Mordecai refused to bow down or show him respect.

The king commanded that everybody bow down to Haman to pay him respect whenever he passed by. They were to worship him as if he were a god. But Mordecai did not bow to Haman. Mordecai was faithful to the one and only true God. He was not about to bow down before anyone except God.

This made Haman angry at Mordecai.

Esther 3:5

When Haman saw that Mordecai would not bow down or show him respect, he was filled with rage.

Haman wanted to get revenge and punish Mordecai for refusing to honor him. When people told Haman that Mordecai was a Jew, Haman decided to not only punish Mordecai; he wanted to harm all the Jews living in the king's empire. He felt that putting them all to death would be a good way to take care of them!

So Haman approached the king about this matter.

Esther 3:8-9

Then Haman approached King Xerxes and said, "There is a certain race of people scattered through all the provinces of your empire who keep themselves separate from everyone else. Their laws are different from those of any other people, and they refuse to obey the laws of the king. So it is not in the king's interest to let them live. (9) If it please the king, issue a decree that they be destroyed, and I will give 10,000 large sacks of silver to the government administrators to be deposited in the royal treasury."

Haman offered to give the king about \$20,000,000 in silver if he'd pass a law that gave the people the right to kill every Jewish man, woman and child living in the Persian Empire.

What made Haman so angry when one man refused to kneel before him? He was full of pride! Haman's pride was so out of control that he decided to make not only Mordecai suffer, but all of Mordecai's people as well.

When you think too highly of your own importance, you allow pride to take control of your life. Then it is easy to become vengeful and try to hurt others. Vengeful pride causes a person to say and do things that deeply hurt other people. Haman's pride was so out of control that it caused him to want to destroy a whole nation of people.

The king approved of Haman's plot to destroy the Jews.

Esther 3:11

The king said, "The money and the people are both yours to do with as you see fit."

The king told Haman to keep the money and do whatever he wanted to the people. Two or three weeks later, Haman called in the king's secretaries and dictated letters to the governors and officials throughout the empire. These letters were signed in the name of King Xerxes and sent into all the provinces of the empire.

The Jews were God's special people through whom He would one day send a Savior to take away the sins of the world. Since before the foundations of the universe, God had planned to come to Earth in the form of a man through the Jewish people.

You and I know that God came as the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus lived a perfect life, then He willingly died on a cross, giving His life's blood in payment for our sin. The Jews were God's chosen people. Yet Haman wanted to destroy the Jews! When Mordecai learned about Haman's wicked scheme, he was heart sick. Mordecai could have gotten angry and tried to get Haman before Haman could pull off his plan.

Mordecai may have felt that circumstances were out of control for the Jews. Couldn't God prevent this terrible thing from happening? Maybe you've felt that way at times. Sometimes we look at things happening in our lives—someone is mean to us, hurts our feelings, steals something from us—and we think that God is not in control. But even when we can't understand or clearly see how God is at work, we can trust that He is and be thankful.

God is always caring for His people and controlling the events of their lives. Nothing that happens is ever a surprise to God. Though we may not understand the reason something happens, we can praise God that we are never out of His care and control.

God carefully oversees even the smallest happening in nature. He sees when a sparrow falls out of a tree. How much more concern He has for people—especially for those who are His children!

The Jews were God's special people, and even though it may have seemed to Mordecai that their circumstances were out of control, God was at work on their behalf.

The Jews were shocked when they heard the horrible news of what was going to happen to them. They could not understand what they had done wrong. They felt they had no hope.

Esther 4:3

And as news of the king's decree reached all the provinces, there was great mourning among the Jews. They fasted, wept, and wailed, and many people lay in burlap and ashes.

Esther sent a servant out to find out from Mordecai what in the world was happening.

Esther 4:7

Mordecai told him the whole story, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews.

It was a frightening, depressing time to be a Jew in the Persian Empire. Mordecai told Esther, "You must stand up for us and plead for our lives with the king!" But, Esther was afraid to do that.

Esther 4:11

"All the king's officials and even the people in the provinces know that anyone who appears before the king in his inner court without being invited is doomed to die unless the king holds out his gold scepter. And the king has not called for me to come to him for thirty days."

Anyone who went into the king's inner court without his invitation was doomed to die unless the king held out his golden scepter. (A Scepter is a short rod held by a king or queen to show that he or she has the most authority and power.) The king had not called Esther to come to him in more than a month. So, she was afraid.

Mordecai told Esther not to keep quiet at a time like this.

Esther 4:14

If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?"

Mordecai was saying, "Who knows but that you became queen just for this reason?!"

Next week we will continue the story of Esther. We'll find out if she had the courage to stand up for God's people.

Closing Prayer

Father, help us to never be like Haman so full of pride that we say and do things that hurt other people. Help us to learn to control our anger and to be loving and thoughtful towards others. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Game Center

"King, May I?"

Play a game like, "Mother, May I?" where whoever is "it", is the King with a crown and a scepter. Make the scepter out of a card board wrapping paper tube covered in gold paper. (You can wrap a small ball in gold tissue paper and stuff the ends of the paper into the tube to make the top of the scepter.) The King grants a child to take a turn. The child asks the King for permission to step, hop, skip, crawl, or however he or she chooses to advanced towards the wall behind the King. The King approves the request by tapping him/her with the scepter. If the child answers the review question correctly the King taps the child again with his scepter and the child then advances forward.

For example, the King taps a child, the child asks, "King, may I take 2 steps forward," the King grants permission by tapping the child with the scepter. Then the child must answer the question correctly. If he/she does, the King taps the child again with the scepter to grant permission to advance. The first child to touch the wall behind the King is the winner.

Use the following questions in a game of your choice:

1. What heroic thing did Mordecai do for the king? (He overheard two bad guys plotting to kill the king and he was able to stop them from doing it.)
2. Who did the king appoint to be the prime minister of his kingdom? (Haman.)
3. What did the king command everyone to do when Haman passed by? (The king commanded that everybody bow down to Haman to pay him respect.)
4. Why didn't Mordecai bow down to Haman? (Mordecai was faithful to the one and only true God. He wouldn't bow down before anyone except God.)
5. What was Haman's reaction to Mordecai's refusal to bow down to him? (Haman wanted to get revenge and punish Mordecai for refusing to honor him.)
6. What was Haman's wicked scheme? (To wipe out all of the Jews; not just Mordecai.)
7. What made Haman so angry when one man refused to kneel before him? (He was full of pride!)
8. Why do we say that the Jews are "God's Chosen People"? (The Jews were God's special people through whom He would one day send a Savior to take away the sins of the world.)
9. What did Mordecai tell Esther to do? (Go see the king and plead for the lives of the people.)

10. Why was it scary for Esther to approach the king? Wasn't she the queen, after all? (Anyone who went into the king's inner court without his invitation was doomed to die unless the king held out his golden scepter.)
11. What is a *scepter*? (A Scepter is a short rod held by a king or queen to show that he or she has the most authority and power.)
12. How did Mordecai encourage Esther to go see the king even without an invitation? (He said, "*Who knows? Perhaps you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this.*")

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