

"Deliverance"  
Esther 6:1–10:3  
Carol Martin

As we cover the last five chapters of Esther in this our last lesson this year, I have a simple outline:

Passion led to pride  
Pride led to pleading  
Pleading led to purging  
Purging led to Purim.

In last week's lesson Maggie gave us great background on the life and times of Xerxes and helped us understand why there would be animosity between Haman and Mordecai because of their lineage and historical disputes. We also pondered the life and death decision presented to this young queen, Esther. Her people were to be annihilated. So, we left Esther fasting, Mordecai defying and Haman plotting. The gallows were built and Haman just had to get a rubber stamp okay from the King Xerxes to hang Mordecai. No problem . . . he went to bed a happy man.

Maggie reminded us that, although the name of God does not appear in the book of Esther, we can certainly see the finger of God orchestrating events. Isn't it coincidental that King Xerxes couldn't sleep that particular night? I can identify with him and with his remedy . . . when I can't sleep, I usually get up and read.

One might think that if the chronicles of his reign are anything like the Kings and Chronicles books of our Bible (or maybe Leviticus), it's enough to make anyone's eyelids drowsy. But actually, these were records of memorable deeds, and anything worth recording that had taken place, or had come to the notice of the king. And, I think, you'd tend to pay a little more attention when you're the main character.

When the reader got to the part about Queen Esther informing him of the assassination plot, his ears perked up to hear the fact that he was saved from the plot by a man named Mordecai. How, he wondered, had he been rewarded? He never had. Well, if ever there was an example of the saying, "timing is everything," it's here, isn't it?

Haman's passionate hatred for Mordecai had propelled him toward the palace early. Whether it was just old wounds, ancient long-standing ancestral feuds, or simply anti-Semitism fueled by an immense ego, Haman was going to settle it this day. It was his day to get even. Before he could get a word out of his mouth, however, the king wanted to know, "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?" We can almost mentally hear Haman shift gears from passionate hatred to pride.

**Point one: Passion led to pride.**

"Who else but me could that be?" Proverbs 16:18 reminds us "Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."

Considering the details Haman offered, this was probably not the first time he'd thought about how he'd like to flaunt his prestige and power before the people. Dressed in a royal robe, riding the king's horse with a royal crest displayed, and being led through the streets of Susa for everyone to honor – that's what Haman thought would proclaim his high status with the king. What irony to find out this was all for Mordecai, and that he had to personally lead him throughout the streets of Susa. Haman was totally humiliated. Can't you just visualize that?

He went home seething, his head covered in grief, Scripture says, but he didn't get any encouragement there either. Zeresh probably repeated the neighborhood gossip; namely, that the Jewish Jehovah could not be overcome. What a day! Everything was against him . . . but at least he would have a good meal . . . he was dining privately with the king and queen.

Have you ever had to do something really difficult? You've prayed, maybe fasted, replayed it over a hundred times in your mind and the hour has come . . . and your courage fails you. I have and I immediately prayed, "God, give me a second chance," and when I blew that "give me another chance." Graciously, He did. I am still in awe. I remember vividly the anxiety and fear. Well, for Esther, too . . . she couldn't quite get it out, perhaps for fear or perhaps the timing wasn't right – whatever, she invited her husband and Haman back the next day for another banquet.

Now for the third time the King asked Queen Esther her petition with the promise of up to half the kingdom. Esther took a deep breath and the story came tumbling out and with it the revelation that she, herself, was a Jew destined for destruction. Haman's goblet and jaw probably both dropped at the same time. What a shock! When the king found out that it was all Haman's idea, he went outside in a rage to cool off.

Why didn't he just shout, "Off with his head!" like the Queen of Hearts in Alice in Wonderland? He may have been angry, yes, but he was a reigning monarch and let's give him some credit for self-control and a brain. Haman was the prime minister and an integral part of kingdom affairs. He'd made one decision without all the facts . . . did he have them all now? Stop! Think!

**Point two: Pride led to pleading.**

Whatever pride Haman felt at being the sole guest at this banquet now turned to pleading as he begged Queen Esther for his life. It reminded me of those souls outside

the ark when the rains began – pounding on the door wanting to be saved from judgment. A sad reminder that a day will come for every man when he will face the God of creation in judgment. How grateful we are to know we will not be pleading for our lives, but praising Him for a deliverance already granted in our salvation gained at the cross of Calvary.

Whatever rationalization, if any, the king might have made in the garden to somehow spare Haman's life, flew right out the window when he returned and saw Haman pawing at the Queen. Enraged all over again, he ordered Haman hanged on the very gallows that had been prepared for Mordecai.

Many years earlier Solomon had written: "The righteousness of the upright will deliver them, but the treacherous will be caught up by their own greed. When a wicked man dies, his hope will perish . . . The righteous is delivered from trouble, but the wicked takes his place." (Proverbs 11:6-8) How prophetic!

And just a personal opinion, I think the king's rage was as much because he loved Esther as his wife, as it was that this was an insult to the queen. Quickly he was informed of the gallows outside Haman's house, and quickly the execution was carried out . . . a true case of poetic justice.

### **Point three: Pleading led to purging.**

Well, the source of the evil edict may have been eliminated, but the consequences still remained. The Jews were to be destroyed and by the law of the Medes and Persians; the edict the king had signed for Haman could not be changed. The same is true of God's law. It stands firm – "The wages of sin is still death." (Romans 6:23) For the Jews of Esther's time another edict was issued giving the Jews not only the right to defend themselves but to take severe retaliatory action and plunder the enemy's goods. The battles were fierce and many died. But God's people were saved.

God too issued another edict concerning the wages of sin – "Whosoever believes in Jesus is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life for God's wrath remains on him." (John 3: 17, 36) Jesus fought and won the battle for us on the cross. And just as the Jews had to take personal action, we must also.

So, the evil influence of Haman was purged from the palace and the righteous influence of Mordecai took his place. He was honored and promoted. But the day came – the battles ensued – the Jewish enemies were struck down.

There is always a curious aspect to this story in Esther, at least for me . . . why did Esther ask for a second day of retaliation in the city of Suza when clearly the Jews had been successful in defending themselves? I didn't read a clear explanation of why she might have done that, but it did make me stop to think about how far should we go to get back at or get even with someone? You know it's easy to overindulge in a lot of areas . . . too many helpings at the all-you-can-eat-buffet, exceeding the credit limit on our charge cards, nursing grudges because "they started it," or enjoying our pity parties singing our "someone done me wrong" song. Retaliation is defined in Webster as "to repay (as an injury) in kind . . . to return like for like . . . to get revenge." It's a strong human emotion. But we don't have to give in to every emotion, do we? Self-control is the key to mastery over any of those desires. And self-control can be cultivated . . . it is one of the fruits of the Spirit.

That quality of self-control is illustrated in this passage. We read that Haman's ten sons were killed and then hanged on display. And we've read enough Bible together to know that retaliation often extended in those cultures to include whole families. (By the way, the Jewish Targum says that Haman had 208 other sons, so theoretically his line was not wiped out. No wonder he bragged about his vast wealth and many sons back in Esther 5:11.) But the self-control that is evident is that they did not lay hands on the plunder of their enemies.

#### **Point four: Purging led to Purim.**

To celebrate and commemorate this victorious event, the Feast of Purim was established. As we read, it's called that because Haman cast lots to decide the day of the attack and the lot was called "pur." To this day, Purim is celebrated every year among the Jewish people. They set aside two days for holiday, feasting, gladness and merrymaking. On the first evening they gather to hear the reading of the book of Esther, and they participate in the story by booing and hissing every time Haman's name is read and cheering whenever Mordecai's name is mentioned. Like the old-fashioned melodramas in the era of the silent movies. Maggie mentioned that last week. (I know, many of you are too young to even know what we're talking about.) The second day is set aside for exchanging gifts, very much like we celebrate Christmas.

Ray Stedman makes this interesting comment that "There is a tradition among the Jews that the feast of Purim is the only feast that will be observed after the Messiah comes. The feasts of Tabernacles and Passover and all others will cease, they say, when the Messiah comes. But the feast of Purim will go on even in the days of the kingdom of God on earth as a remembrance of victory over resentment, jealousy, envy, greed, pride, and all other experiences of the self-life."

Remember that, however, is tradition, not Scripture. But I thought it was interesting.

We do not know when Esther finished her earthly pilgrimage. She disappears off the pages of Scripture. Xerxes was murdered in 465 B.C. A conspiracy was hatched by the sons of his deposed wife, Vashti, and they assassinated their father. Artaxerxes was placed on the throne by his older brother. If Esther outlived Xerxes she might have been given a place in the harem of the new king. The fact that the new king was the son of Vashti, and Esther had replaced his mother, he may have been inclined to be less than gracious to her. On the other hand, with the passing of time, coupled with Esther's quiet, winsome ways, it's indeed possible she may have secured a reasonable place in the palace of Artaxerxes to live out her days.

So, what can we conclude from this lesson in Esther . . . I see a couple of things:  
First: Like a pencil in God's hand, we should be ready for His use.

Edward Everett Hale wrote:

I am only one.  
But still I am one.  
I cannot do everything,  
But still I can do something;  
And because I cannot do everything  
I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.

Whenever the Spirit of God touches your spirit to do something, do it. What blessing there is in obedience!

Second: Like a divine watch ticks on God's arm, we should continually count the instances of His divine timing. A sleepless night for the king, Mordecai being noticed, Esther's exposure of Haman. What timing. There's a song with meaningful lyrics:

In His time, in His time;  
He makes all things beautiful in His time.  
Lord, please show me every day,  
As you're teaching me Your way,  
That You do just what You say in Your time.

He is worthy . . . He delivers us. . . He never leaves us or forsakes us . . . He can change hearts, lives, governments. What an awesome God we serve!

To close out our year, I want to do a little recap of where we've been.

I told you at the beginning of the year that the Bible has four things to give us: Revelation, Inspiration, Illumination and Application. Remember that knowledge is education acquired; wisdom is knowledge applied. The scope has been broad and I

truly hope you've been able to apply these many Bible principles to your own life. The Word of God is living and active and meant to reach us right now, today.

Genesis taught us lessons about faith, obedience, marriage, child-rearing, perseverance, forgiveness and God's sovereignty. We studied creation, the first family – Adam/Eve/Cain/Abel/Seth, Noah and the flood, Abraham/Sarah, Isaac/Rebekah, Esau with his foreign wives and Jacob with Leah/Rachel and his 12 sons and Uncle Laban and then, of course, there was Joseph. It started in a garden and ended in a coffin.

We learned in Job that there's a lot more to that book than just patience and suffering. We learned some counseling truths as we listened to Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar and Elihu; some discernment truths as we recognized that some of what they said was true but they drew wrong conclusions. How careful we must be to weigh the counsel of man against the Word of God. And Job reminded us again that God is God and nothing befalls us that has not been sifted through His hands. I hoped you would not be afraid of Job because you'd find a new appreciation for that book. Did you?

In the past we've studied the United Kingdom under Saul, David and Solomon and then the Divided Kingdom with Northern Israel being disbursed into Assyria and the Southern Kingdom of Benjamin and Judah being taken captivity into Babylon. This year we studied the Restored Kingdom. We discovered that even 70 years in captivity did not have a lasting effect on the godliness of Judah as a whole. A new temple begun by Zerubbabel, the spiritual guiding of Ezra and the governmental and practical guidance of Nehemiah, and even the voices of Haggai and Malachi, had short term revival effect.

In the long run we found out again that God is right . . . the heart is desperately wicked and will naturally go back to its old ways. That is why we are so blessed to be born again in Jesus Christ. We no longer have that old heart, but He gives us a new heart to love God and empowers us to withstand the temptation to return to the old ways of the world by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

We closed out our year with the love and divine destiny story of Esther and I said in the beginning that it might even cause you to ask yourself, "Why am I here in this time and this place?" Did it? I hope so.

Some of you had wide eyes back in September when we told you what block of Scripture we'd be outlining for this year. . . but we took it one bite at a time. Aren't you proud of yourself for not only having studied these books chapter by chapter, but also for the fact that a layer of the veil has been lifted and that these Scriptures are much clearer to you today?

The Bible is the whole counsel of God. Hopefully, every time you're exposed to the Old Testament you gain a new appreciation of God's plan from Genesis to Revelation. You learn more about God's character, His attributes, His wisdom, His holiness and His

deep love for His creation. And, why we needed His intervention to send us a Savior, His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Beginning September 12<sup>th</sup>, we'll begin to study one of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life as written by the Apostle John, as well as 1, 2, and 3 John. We last did that unit in 2011. It includes a special lesson on prayer and one on the Holy Spirit. If you've joined us since then, this will be a new and exciting study for you. We sincerely hope you'll be back and bring a friend!

Please stand for the Doxology.

