

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

BY REV. M. F. HODGES
August 13, 1922.

Subject—Esther Saves Her People.
Esther 4:10 to 5:3.

Golden Text.—“The righteous cry and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.—Palm 34:17.

Time.—474 B. C.
Place.—Shushan.

If we are to understand this lesson we must read the entire book of Esther which is a most fascinating story. This lesson and the entire book falls in the days of Ahasuerus (Xerxes) during the period between the dedication of the rebuilt temple and march of Ezra and his company from Babylon to Jerusalem. Esther was born and reared in captivity so she knew nothing of the native land of her people. She was an orphan girl, having been carefully cared for by her cousin, Mordecai. She now comes to a place of power for the salvation of the Jews. God deals with men and nations according to light they have and not by what they have not. Today's study as many lessons of the past few months are repulsive to us when viewed in the light we have. Vashti is the most fascinating figure in the entire book, a woman of charming modesty. Vashti would rather lose her crown than make a vulgar display of her person. Would to God that womanhood today would stop long enough to get a lesson of modesty from Vashti.

Haman, a high minded bigot had been brought into prominence by the king. Naturally he hated the captive Jews in the realm; when Mordecai failed to bow to him as he rode in splendor along the streets the wrath of Haman knew no bounds. He immediately calls together his friends and plots for the destruction of all the Jews in the realm. Like many men whom we have studied in the past lessons, he failed to reckon with the unseen power of an all-seeing God whose eyes had ever been on the suffering of His people. In this devilish plot Haman would use the king to carry out his plans for the destruction of the Jews. Haman makes an appeal to the king that has been attractive enough to men in the past to yield. He offered to pay into the treasury ten thousand talents. “The love of money is the root of all evil.” Ahasuerus took to Haman's bait without further delay, not even knowing that his beloved queen Vashti was of the despised Jews in the realm.—He

gave Haman his ring with which to seal the letters that were sent commanding the destruction of the Jews. The decree goes forth and as a consequence there was great mourning, not only in the palace at Shushan, but throughout the whole realm. Mordecai put on sackcloth and ashes and hung about the palace gate, not daring to enter because it meant death to enter in mourning. When the news of Mordecai's mourning reached the ears of his foster daughter, she at once began an investigation, sending her servant, Hatach, to determine the cause of Mordecai's grief.

The scene changes now and is inside of the palace. Mordecai requests Esther to intercede with the king on behalf of the Jews. She hesitates because to enter the presence of the king except when the royal scepter is extended means sudden death; and she had not been before the king in thirty days. Mordecai sends another urgent request, stating that she being a Jew, could not hope to escape if the bloody orders of Haman were executed. Esther now rises to the occasion and orders Mordecai to have all the Jews in Shushan pray for her, while she and her friends in the palace would do likewise. “So will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.” She took advantage of this only chance left to the Jews and by her courage and daring to do the right wins out.

Haman and his bunch of cowards like himself are planning to build a gallows, fifty cubits high for the hanging of Mordecai; all the while Esther is planning a couple of feasts for the king and Haman in order that she may ask for the destruction of Haman and the saving of herself and her people. Haman is overjoyed at the first feast and goes away full of conceit and boasting. Just look for a moment at this proud, conceited bigot; but receiving no honor from Mordecai he is almost ready to burst with rage. Haman is expecting to see Mordecai dangle from the gallows. Esther has very cordially invited Haman and the king to dine with her the next day. This little measley self-willed fool is wounded in his pride. Those who know say that if you pull a peacock's tail feathers out he will hide himself. King Ahasuerus is unable to sleep and while the long sleepless hours of the night away by having the court records read in his hearing. When the servant read how that Mordecai had thwarted a plot made against the king's life by Bigthan and Teresh,

that was interesting indeed to the king. Mordecai had been overlooked when plumes were being handed out. Haman is heard out in the hall of the palace and is invited into the king's presence; he is asked what shall be done to the man whom the king delights to honor. Haman again swells with pride and immediately decides: I am certainly the man about whom the king speaks. “Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse which the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head. And let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes.” Haman sees himself now strutting about wearing the king's cast-off garments, riding through the streets of Shushan, while some nobleman leads his horse and all the people bow to him. How his feathers must have fallen when the king commands all the foregoing honors to be given to that despised Mordecai. “Pride goeth before destruction and an haughty spirit before a fall.”

At the feast tomorrow all will be settled. Esther relates all this plot to the king and tells him that this wicked Haman is responsible for the whole affair. The king leaves the room for a while and on his return commands that his servants hang Haman on the gallows built for the hanging of Mordecai. This is not the only instance recorded where the wicked have been caught in the snares set for the righteous. Some times wicked men in a community, young men at that, bid defiance to all the warnings against sin and go headlong in their pursuit of worldly pleasure until destruction meets them. Haman was made to swallow a bitter pill and that of his own make without any sugar. “Be sure your sins will find you out.” There is a God who is able and will always defend His children.

Esther is the important figure in the last scene when the curtain rolls back. She has secured permission from the king and sends out a decree giving the Jews permission to defend themselves against their enemies on the day appointed for the slaughter. They fought and won. The God of battles was with them. Their enemies were defeated and they had peace and rest.

Practical lessons. 1. Results of intercessory prayer. “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Esther's prayer was for the good of others. 2. Qualification for duty is unbounded faith.

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This 12th day of July, 1922.

G. E. HOLLOMAN, Administrator,
7-14-6t-pd. of Martha E. Godwin.

Believing that right and truth will win in the overthrow of the wicked. 3. God is working with His people for the confusion and overthrow of every evil work. 4. What we need today is more modest Vashtis, courageous Esthers, praying Daniles, brave Jeremiahs, true prophets like Ezekiel and a people able to see what God intends to make of His people if only they are willing. In this day when our fair maidens are to a great extent losing their modesty and self respect it will be well to stop and ponder the action of Vashti. She would rather lose her place as queen and retain her modesty and self respect than to be queen and lose that which is beyond price. May the day soon come when mothers and their daughters will no longer put their modesty on the market of the world at the small price of a little pleasure. Give us again the day when men and women will have respect enough to dress decent in public. Self-respecting, true hearted young men do not seek companions among the immodest cheap society dames.

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