

## Zeresh Haman's wife

### *Esther 5:9-14*

**5:9** Then went Haman forth that day joyful and with a glad heart: but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he stood not up, nor moved for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai.

**5:10** Nevertheless Haman refrained himself: and when he came home, he sent and called for his friends, and **Zeresh** his wife. **5:11** And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. **5:12** Haman said moreover, Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and to morrow am I invited unto her also with the king. **5:13** Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.

**5:14** Then said **Zeresh** his wife and all his friends unto him, Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and to morrow speak thou unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon: then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet. And the thing pleased Haman; and he caused the gallows to be made.

### *Esther 6:11-14*

**6:11** Then took Haman the apparel and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and brought him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour.

**6:12** And Mordecai came again to the king's gate. But Haman hasted to his house mourning, and having his head covered. **6:13** And Haman told **Zeresh** his wife and all his friends every thing that had befallen him. Then said his wise men and **Zeresh** his wife unto him, If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him.

**6:14** And while they were yet talking with him, came the king's chamberlains, and hasted to bring Haman unto the banquet that Esther had prepared.

#### **a wicked wife?**

Haman's wife, Zeresh, seemed to be wicked like her husband. He wanted to kill Mordecai, and she and others with her told him how to do it (15:14). Thus she sounded somewhat like Jezebel in 1 Kgs. 21:7.

Nevertheless, Haman's wisemen and wife spoke quite differently later in 6:13. Perhaps they knew that God was against the descendants of Amalek (Ex. 17:8-16). So was she really as wicked as she seemed at first?

## negatives

The Book of Esther depict Haman as one of the most evil people who ever lived (7:6), but what about his wife, Zeresh? Was she wicked as well? Obviously, her call for the building of a seven story high gallows for Mordecai (5:14) was extreme and cold-hearted, but does this show that she hated the Jews as much as Haman did? We can not tell for sure, but she and Haman's other advisors later seemed to try to distance themselves from Haman's hatred for the Jews in 6:13. Probably this was because they were afraid that they would fall before Mordecai along with Haman. (Note in 9:14 that Haman's sons were killed.) Things had changed greatly between 5:14 and 6:13.

Those who do not believe in the historical accuracy of the Book of Esther often point to the super high gallows that Zeresh suggested and Haman built as evidence that the Book is only comedy. While there are many humorous things in Esther, the gallows in not one of them. (Zeresh was not making a joke.) The structure was actually built, and it was so high that other officials in the palace were quickly aware of it (7:9).

As for how such a high structure could be built quickly, it may have been because Haman's group was in charge of wood and royal construction. Wood was precious in Shushan. So it probably was controlled by a high official.

*Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).*

### **A** ( ) **Zeresh and company were inconsistent.**

- A-1 ( ) In 5:14 she said what Haman wanted to hear.
- A-2 ( ) In 5:14 she took the lead; in 6:13 the wise men did so.
- A-3 ( ) In 6:13 they spoke to Haman like he was a total stranger.
- A-4 ( ) She was enthusiastic in 5:14, but they were pessimistic in 6:13.
- A-5 ( ) The situation changed between 5:14 and 6:13. So they changed.

### **B** ( ) **Zeresh and company did not help Haman.**

- B-1 ( ) Haman looked to his wife and other associates for helpful advice.
- B-2 ( ) The gallows she suggested were used to hang Haman (7:9-10).
- B-3 ( ) She did not rebuke Haman for his pride and boasting (5:11).
- B-4 ( ) She did not speak to Haman like a true friend (Pro. 27:6).
- B-5 ( ) Nothing they said (5:14, 6:13) helped Haman.
- B-6 ( ) They were correct in 6:13 but unhelpful.
- B-7 ( ) They may have been business people.

## positives

Women are mentioned far more frequently in Ruth and Esther than in any other Bible Book. In both books, the role of women in God's plan of salvation is emphasized. Aside from Boaz in Ruth and Mordecai in Esther, the men in these two Books are all rather weak in contrast to the women. Moreover each named woman in Esther had a corresponding male counterpart.

Similar things could be said about the content of and the main characters in Judges chapter four (Deborah & Barak) as well as Luke chapters one and two in the New Testament. Genesis 3:15 shows that salvation has always been through the Seed of the woman.

Haman and those who advised him, including his wife, failed miserably. In part this was because of Haman's many flaws. His pride is clearly seen, for instance, in his foolish boasting to his wife about the number of his children (5:11). (At least some of them must have been her children!) His proud attitude obviously played an important part in his downfall, as seen in 6:6-11.

That said, there was much more involved in Haman's undoing than his own faults. The Lord was at work behind the scenes, often in subtle ways, such as in the king not being able to sleep in 6:1-3. Zeresh's bad advice in 5:14 was involved as well (7:9).

*Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).*

**C** ( ) **The Gentile women help show what the Gentile leaders were like.**

C-1 ( ) Vashti helps reveal the king's weakness.

C-2 ( ) Zeresh helps reveal Haman's pride and weakness.

C-3 ( ) Zeresh perhaps did not hate the Jews as much as Haman.

C-4 ( ) The women were weak socially, but the men also were weak.

C-5 ( ) It is important to know that wicked Haman did not act alone (7:6).

**D** ( ) **The failure of Haman (et al.) reveals the hidden hand of God.**

D-1 ( ) God's people were spared; their enemies died.

D-2 ( ) The high gallows was part of the failure (7:9, 9:13).

D-3 ( ) Haman failed because he listened to his wife (5:14, 7:10).

D-4 ( ) Haman's wise men and wife foresaw the failure (5:14, 6:13).

D-5 ( ) The fasting of the Jews in 4:16 was an indirect reference to God.

D-6 ( ) God often reverses things (6:12, 9:1-5, Lk. 1:51-53, 6:25, 16:25).

D-7 ( ) The existence of Israel as a modern nation reveals the hand of God.

## worksheet answers

Even though she may not have hated the Jews and Mordecai as much as her husband did (C-3), Zeresh enthusiastically said what Haman wanted to hear in 5:14 (A-1). Later in 6:13, she and his political advisors were pessimistic and standoffish (A-2). Though she and his other advisors did not treat him as a total stranger in 6:13 (A-3), they may have wished to distance themselves from him at that point. They said that **you** (*Haman*) will surely fall.

Haman's wise men and wife spoke more like true friends in 6:13 than she and his friends did earlier in 5:14 (B-4). Yet, they never actually helped him in 6:13 (B), because they spoke the truth after it was too late. If Haman had been rebuked earlier, it might have been more helpful (B-3).

In a superficial way, Haman failed because he listened to his wife (D-3) concerning building the gallows (B-2). Yet, line D-3 is only partly true at best. It is unfair to blame Zeresh for Haman's fall. He fell because he was wicked (7:6) and because God opposed him (D). In 6:13, even his wise men and wife seemed to acknowledge this. They foresaw his fall after it had already begun (D-4).

Although Haman did not act alone, he is said to be **the** adversary (7:6) in a special way. His wife was bad, of course, but he was **the** enemy (7:6). Line C-5 is partly correct, however, since Zeresh and others are included in the story.

## So what?

Though it soon thereafter aided in his execution (7:9), Zeresh helped Haman briefly flaunt his wealthy and power (5:14). Lavishly displaying wealth and power was part of the Persian political system (1:3-4), and Zeresh knew that an impressive display could be erected quickly by an official who controlled, or at least had free access to, the royal lumber yard and construction crews. So she helped Haman erect an impressive seven-story spire *and have a great fall*.

This was not truly helpful (B), and it would have been better for Haman, Zeresh, and their children if she had refused to encourage him. She should have been more like Queen Vashti (1:12). Sometimes the best way to help one's husband and family is to NOT say what he or they want to hear.

Why did Zeresh not rebuke her husband for his proud boasting (5:11, B-3)? Probably it was because she was proud as well. She undoubtedly enjoyed wealth and power as much as he did. (Her name in Persian may mean *golden*.) That said, Zeresh seems to have been more practical and less emotionally driven than her husband (C-3). For sure, his wise men were (6:13, B-7).

Zeresh may have been killed along with her sons (8:11, 9:12-13), but we do not know for sure. It is certain, however, that the hidden hand of God was at work to save the Jewish people (D). (*Line D-7 is probably correct as well.*)

## applications

*Apply the points which you believe are most important or seem most needful.*

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