

celloutlines | week four

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ESTHER BIBLE STUDY WEEK FOUR

The Persian Times

Exclusive Interview with Haman

Queen Esther has held a private banquet for the King and Prime Minister Haman. Our palace reporter was able to speak to Haman as he left the banquet and sent this report. 'I managed to catch Haman as he left the Queen's private quarters, just before his bodyguards arrived to escort him home. In those snatched few minutes Haman told me it was the most exquisite banquet he had ever seen... food and wine to rival even the King's table. He said he had reclined with the King and Queen all evening, eating and drinking, waited on by the Queen's personal servants. 'We talked about all sorts of things, from important matters of the kingdom to trivial matters of recent TV broadcast,' said Haman. 'It was evident that the King and Queen enjoyed my company – we laughed a lot together.' Haman was clearly buzzing with the evening's events, pride and excitement written all over his face. As Haman was rushed away by the guards, he shouted back to me, 'Oh, I almost forgot... I've been invited again tomorrow! Make sure you put that in your article!' Surely this man must be the most envied in the country right now. Our reporter will try to catch him again tomorrow night as he leaves the second banquet.

Horror as Haman is Hanged

The country is once again thrust into confusion as Haman, the most powerful man in the whole empire after the King, has been hanged. No one has been able to establish the facts, but it would appear that something went dreadfully wrong in the Queen's quarters last night where she was hosting another private dinner for herself, King Xerxes and Haman. Palace sources say that just after midnight shouting was heard coming from the Queen's dining room. Several minutes later Haman was removed by guards with his face covered, signalling he was a condemned man. In a horrific and ironic twist, Haman was hanged on the same gallows that he himself had just had built, some 23 metres high. It is rumoured that Haman's whole estate – property, cash, servants, gold – will be given to the Queen to do with as she sees fit. It is also thought likely that the ten fine sons of Haman, along with their families, will also be hanged before the week is out. We will bring you more details of these tragic circumstances as they become clear.

Queen Esther Saves The Jews

Yes, it's really true! Queen Esther has saved the Jews! In a breathtaking twist of events it has been made known that the Queen herself is a Jew. Putting her own life at risk, she made a desperate plea to the King on behalf of all the Jews in the empire. The King's fury knew no bounds when he learnt that his beautiful Queen was facing certain annihilation and demanded to know who had

arranged such a cruel act of racial hatred. The finger pointed firmly at Haman, which explains the sensational execution of Haman two nights ago. The King, Queen and Mordecai (to whom it now emerges the Queen is related) have worked unceasingly for the last 24 hours to devise a plan that would overrule the previous edict. This new order will be released to the public within the next 12 hours but some details have already been leaked. It would

seem that the King's edict will grant the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves; to destroy any armed force that might attack them. Mordecai has been seen wearing royal garments and it seems likely that he is to succeed Haman as Prime Minister. The Jews surely have reason to celebrate. They have a sympathetic king, a truly courageous queen, and their God must surely be the God above all others.

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FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

You Will Need

Bibles
 Pen / paper
 Reflective music if possible
 Props to create four prayer zones
 Cards for writing dreams and desires on
 Baskets / boxes to put the cards in

WELCOME

Icebreaker activity: This game is a variation of the classic rock/paper/scissors or Giant/Wizards/Elves. It is called Xerxes, Haman and Esther!

Make up an action for each of the three characters – Xerxes, Haman and Esther. Each character's action must feature a pose, hand motions and a noise. Teach the group the action and then practise a few times so everyone gets the hang of it.

Explain that the characters win or lose on the following basis:

Esther beats Haman; because she got him hanged!

Haman beats Xerxes; because he tricked him into signing the edict against the Jews.

Xerxes beats Esther; because he chose her to become queen.

Ask the group to pair up and stand facing each other. Count down '3, 2, 1 Go!' On 'Go' each person must make their chosen action: either Xerxes, Haman or Esther. The partner that 'loses' is eliminated. The remaining players find other partners. Continue until you have a winner! (If you want to play without the elimination factor, have each person total up the times they win and see who has the most when you decide to stop the game.)

For older groups

Divide into groups of 3-4 people and give each group a word such as MORDECAI.

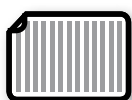
The groups have to 'spell' the word using objects that they have on their person or have brought with them. The initial letter of each object should be the same as one of the letters in the word. For example, a Magazine, Overcoat, Ring, Disk, Earring, Cap, Apple, I-Pod spells out MORDECAI.

WORD

Read the articles from *The Persian Times* above.

Group interview activity

Divide into pairs within the group. One of the pair is a newspaper reporter who has the opportunity to interview Esther about the events of chapters 1-7. The other person is Esther. Spend several minutes interviewing Esther as she prepares to approach the King. Then discuss what the group discovers through these mock interviews.



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1. Sense of Destiny and Calling

Read Esther 4:12-15.

Ask each person to write their own paraphrase of Mordecai's answer to Esther's hesitation. For example:

Esther, you are also a Jew. You won't escape the genocide just because you are in the palace. Don't you think that this is what the last few years have been about? You, an unknown young Jewish girl, chosen to be the Queen of Persia – I think God designed all this so that you would be in the right place at the right time. You are the only one in the whole empire who can stop this. How brilliant to be part of Gods plan! You must take courage and fulfil your destiny.

Esther was a normal girl who had been taken captive, her parents had died, her relative Mordecai had brought her up in the Jewish tradition, but God had an amazing plan for her and Mordecai's lives.

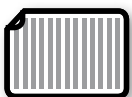
Discuss the following questions:

- Do you believe that God has created and designed you for a destiny and a purpose, maybe not as famous as Esther's but still as important in God's plan?
- What dreams and desires do you have for your life?
- At this stage in your life, do you know what it is that God may be calling you into?
- Who are you making yourself accountable to as you seek to follow your dreams?

Jot down some thoughts in the following boxes and see if God speaks to you about his plan for your life.

<p>My abilities and talents</p>	<p>The things I feel passionate about</p>
<p>The things I know about God that I want others to know</p>	<p>The places where I find myself</p>

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Everyone wants to be a hero and receive praise, honour and wealth. But few are willing to pay the price. Mordecai served the government faithfully for years, bore Haman's hatred and oppression, and risked his life for his people. The price to be paid by God's heroes is long-term commitment. Are you ready and willing to pay the price?

Esther waited before she went before the King, and again before she presented her request. She took time to pray and seek God to be sure she was ready. She sensed God's timing and followed his lead. In the same way we often have to wait on God with all our hopes and dreams. Waiting on God is one of the most difficult things Christians are called to do. God may not fulfil his promises or answer our prayers straight away. As we wait we can submit all our dreams and desires to him, then we must stay faithful, delight in him and trust that he will 'give us the desires of our heart' (Psalm 37:4).

Be accountable in your dreams and desires. It is possible for us sometimes to misunderstand what God is saying to us. Share your thoughts with a mature Christian friend who can guide you and support you as you seek to follow God in his plan for your life.

2. Being Salt and Light

We often think what is it that God might be calling us to in our lives, what is his big vision for us? If you are unable to answer the questions above about your 'destiny' in God, it may have you worried. But don't be concerned... when we look in the Bible we see that as his disciples his call for us is already clear – he wants us to be like 'salt and light'. He has called us to get out there and show the world his love.

Read Matthew 5:14–16 *The Message*

'Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavours of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.'

'Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colours in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand – shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in Heaven.'

Read the extract from *The Vision and the Vow*

Ask everyone to get into a comfortable position where they can listen carefully to the story you are about to read. Read the extract below, taken from Pete Greig's book *The Vision and The Vow*. This illustrates that we already have a call on our lives from God.

APPLICATION

Discuss what it means for us to be salt and light.

If the group has difficulty with this question you can use some of the following thoughts during or after the discussion:

For us salt is mainly something that we use for cooking... apart from in the cold weather when the councils run out of grit and start putting table salt on the roads!

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In Jesus' time salt was used for all different kinds of stuff, including putting on the soil and the manure pile. When salt was put on the soil it acted like a fertiliser encouraging plants to grow. When people poured salt on to animal manure it helped to kill off the bacteria in the germs. When Jesus says he wants us to be like salt it means helping others grow spiritually and helping to show up and kill off the sin that destroys their lives. When Jesus talks about showing our light, he wants us to make a difference by showing love. We can't do that in an already light place... light shows up best in the darkness. It's no good just hanging around with our Christian mates all the time; it's important that we are spending time with and showing love and sharing Jesus with people who don't know him. As disciples of Jesus we are someone who knows Jesus but also should make him known. We should live differently, sharing his love with those around us.

Ask each individual to make a practical list of some ways that they can be salt and light. For example:

- Meet up for a coffee with the one person at school/college/work that doesn't have any friends.
- Visit the elderly person next door and offer to do some errands.
- Babysit for the single mum from church who is not able to go out very much.
- Tell your best friend / housemate / boss you are a Christian and what Jesus means to you.
- Offer to help the so called 'thick' person in your class with their homework.
- Help your parents / housemates with some housework.
- Pray for your friend who is struggling and write them a card with an encouraging Bible verse.
- Being kind to and do something nice for your brother or sister/housemate.

It must be a very practical list, which can consist of small actions, but all of which demonstrate a way of showing someone else the love of Jesus.

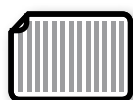
NB Remind the group to stay safe and, especially younger members, to tell their parents/guardians what they wish to get involved in.

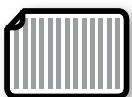
PRAYER

Create four small zones in your group's physical space representing: my life now; my future; my family; my neighbourhood. In an attitude of prayer (with some reflective music in the background if possible) ask people to individually visit each zone and to write down all their dreams and desires on a piece of card for that area of their lives... all the things they want to achieve for God and in their own life. At each zone ask them to pray silently and submit all their desires to God. Have a box / basket or somewhere they can confidentially place their cards as an outward sign of their prayers.

For next time

Ask each person to bring an object that represents something about the time they have spent in this cell group over recent weeks/months/years. It could be absolutely anything, eg an elastic band to represent how the group have been joined together; some sweet wrappers to represent how much they have enjoyed getting to know people on the inside; a book to represent new stories being written in their lives. Anything at all... as creative as possible!





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Extract From *The Vision And The Vow* by Pete Greig

I was giving a friend a lift in my car, and we got to talking about life. 'I don't know what God's calling me to do,' he confessed, and asked me to pray about what it might be.

'Why?' I asked. 'I already know what Jesus wants you to do!'

'You do?' he gasped with excitement. 'So what is it? What's my call?'

I paused, enjoying the suspense. Drums rolled. String quartets tuned up. My friend held his breath....

'Your call,' I said slowly, 'is to be a worship leader....'

He looked pleased, really pleased, so I continued: '...but not necessarily with a guitar in your hand.'

'Okayyy,' he murmured.

'Your call is to befriend that funny little lady at the end of your street...'

He seemed less pleased with this prospect.

'Your call is to feed the hungry and to spend yourself on behalf of the poor....'

By now he was looking distinctly troubled.

'...and to offer hospitality to strangers who just turn up in town needing a place to crash.'

Consternation.

'And it's to fast.'

He was starting to look furious.

'And it's to pray so long and hard that you run out of words and tears.'

There was no going back:

'Your call,' I continued, 'is to preach the good news of Jesus to every person who will listen and a few who won't. Your call is to go somewhere, anywhere, wherever, whenever, for Jesus, and never stop.

Your call is to love people no one else loves and to forgive them when they treat you like dirt – or worse.

Do your job to the very best of your ability without grumbling about your boss or whining about your colleagues. Your call is to pray for the sick, and when they are healed, to dance all night. And when they aren't, to weep with them and love them even more.'

I glanced across at him and was relieved to see that his expression was beginning to mellow.

'Your call is to honour your parents, pray for your leaders, study the Scriptures, and attend plenty of parties. Be a peacemaker in every situation; when the fight breaks out on the bus home late at night and when the gossip starts to circulate at church. Your call is to pick up litter in the street when no one else is looking, to wipe the toilet seat, to pull gum off from under the desk. It's to get to meetings early to put out the chairs.'

By now he was smiling.

'Your call is to make disciples and to teach them to obey everything Jesus commanded. And don't forget to minister grace to them when they sin. Which they will. Your mission is to baptise and to cast out evil spirits. Your call is to bind up broken hearts wherever you find them, and you will find them wherever you look. It's to visit prisons. And hospitals. And to....'

'Yeah, yeah,' he interrupted good-naturedly, trying to shut me up, but I was on a roll – and I knew he couldn't leave, because I was driving the car.

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'Your call,' I continued resolutely, 'is to listen more than you talk and to listen with your eyes as well as your ears.'

He was shaking his head in mock despair. I carried on: 'It's to do the chores again and again without grumbling. It's to buy ethical coffee and to recycle your bottles. And while you're at it, don't forget to leave anonymous gifts on people's doorsteps.'

By now we were both laughing, and I was finally running out of steam: 'And when you've done all that,' I grinned, jabbing him in the ribs at each syllable, 'come back and see me, and we can spend a little time praying about Phase Two!'

The problem for most of us is not that we don't know what God wants of us. It's that we know exactly what he wants of us, and it's not what we want to do!

General William Booth, Founder of The Salvation Army, once turned to a young man who claimed not to have had a call from God. 'What?' he bellowed, fixing him with piercing eyes: 'You've never had a call? You mean you've never heard the call!'

