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BIB102

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Assignment 4

- Read the Book of Esther, and write an essay addressing the following: analyze and describe the characters of Haman, Mordechai, and Esther, using examples from the story (one paragraph each character); who do you think the hero of the story is (and why); where can you see God working in the narrative.

The book of Esther begins with a grand banquet at the palace of King Xerxes, located in the city of Susa, the capital of the Persian empire. The king, under the effects of wine, decided to divorce his wife, Queen Vashti and enters the search to find a new queen. The young Jewish Esther is the chosen one, having previously been evaluated in a beauty contest. Esther was a young orphan, whose cousin Mordechai, quite older than her, took care of her. Both cousins hid their Jewish identity from the entire kingdom. After the banquet after Esther's coronation, Mordechai heard two guards conspiring to assassinate King Xerxes. Mordechai, faced with such a situation, quickly decided to tell Esther, who told the king, accrediting Mordechai. Later, King Xerxes named Haman, an evil man descendant from Agag, a vizier of the empire, thus exalting him to one of highest position in the kingdom. As consequence of the exaltation, King Xerxes forced everyone to kneel before the new vizier, Haman. Mordechai, on the other hand, refuses to kneel, which was an act that angered Haman. Charged with anger, Haman decides to make a decree to exterminate all Jews after learning that Mordechai was indeed Jewish. Esther

and Mordechai were the only salvation trump card of the Jews. Mordechai wants Esther to rebel her Jewish identity to the king and ask him to reverse the decree on the annihilation of the Jews. However, no one could address the king without being expressly requested by him; if this action was carried out, it was paid for with death. Despite the possible circumstances, Esther decides to have a banquet with King Xerxes and Haman the following night to make her request. Haman was still so angry at Mordechai that he had prepared a large stake to hang Mordechai after the banquet. In a turn of events, King Xerxes was unable to have a good sleep that night, and he remembered Mordechai, the man who saved his life from a possible conspiracy. Xerxes, as a gesture of gratitude, decides that he be honored by dressing him in illustrious clothing and be ridden on horseback through the city. Xerxes tells Haman to take on this task. The next day at the banquet, Esther rebels her Jewish identity to the judge and asks that the extermination decree against the Jews be annulled. Esther rebels that Haman is in charge of everything and that her purposes are to annihilate all Jews, therefore she and Mordechai, the man who took her life, would also be killed. The king unleashes his fury by hanging Haman on the stake he sent to raise to murder Mordechai. Because revoking a decree that had already been established was forbidden, they decide to draw up a counter-decree in which Jews were allowed to defend themselves against anyone who wanted to kill them. The Jews are victorious, and they are saved from annihilation. This victory opens a feast that would take place annually for two days. This feast was named the Feast of Purim whose purpose was to commemorate the deliverance from the destruction of the Jews.

Haman is described as a villain that could represent the image of Satan. He was named as Haman the evil, as well as Haman the Agagite, since he was descendant from Agag. His purpose was to set an end in Mordechai's and every Jewish people, therefore, ending the lineage of the Messiah. The idea that the image of Satan is represented in

Haman can be seen in Esther 5:14 when the pole is commanded to be lifted. Just as Satan decided to build the cross on which Christ was crucified, Haman commands to erect the pole on which Mordechai was supposed to be hung. Haman was a man without compassion and guided from the feeling of anger. Although he seemed with a strong character and royal to his principles, it can be seen how in moments of danger or death, the human being shows his most sensitive side, in order to seek forgiveness and save his life. *"...Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen. But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life."* (Est 7:6-7). However, it was not God's plan to spare Haman's life.

Mordechai could be interpreted as the image of God in the story. Although God is not mentioned in the Book of Esther, there are some situations a coincidence that could happen due to His presence and guidance. Mordechai was Esther's older cousin and the one who took care of her after the death of both of Esther's parents. He played an important role in the story since he is an important key to save the Jewish people. Mordechai is shown as a kind of representation of God's plans to help His people. It is known that God does not take part physically in this book, but it is shown when Mordechai heard the two officers conspiring against King Xerxes (Esther 2:21), or when Mordechai guided Esther to take the decision of revealing King Xerxes her Jewish identity; because Mordechai knew that something was going to protect him from death.

Esther was a young Jewish lady who was orphaned at an early age and raised by her cousin Mordechai, who cared for her and loved her as her own daughter, and Esther welcomed him as a guardian. Esther is a proof of how God has a goal for each of us. She went from being a simple Jewish woman to being Queen of the Persian Empire in Susa, and to be a key player in preventing the destruction of the Jewish people. As can be observed throughout history, Esther's life is marked by the obedience and submission

characteristic of the women of the time. She shows respect and obedience to both her cousin Mordechai and King Xerxes, which can be seen in the way she addresses him in chapter 5 verse 4. Esther also shows respect for God. She is willing to risk herself for her God, and her people in order to save them. Esther made the decision of seeking God with all her might and then showing her thoughts to King Xerxes, to face him: *"When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."* (Esther 4:16).

In my opinion, there should not be a single hero in this story. Both Esther and Mordechai perform a series of acts that lead to the result of ending the evil figure of Haman and saving the Jewish people. Both made decisions and decided to do the right thing. These simple acts can include from Mordechai's refusal to kneel to Haman, because as a Jew, he only does such an act of respect and honor mainly to God; as well as inciting and convincing Esther to "stand up for her people" and confessing to King Xerxes that she is Jewish, in order to keep the Jewish people alive. In addition, another hero who "goes unnoticed" in this story, but who underlies every action of well done by these characters, is God. It can be interpreted as under each coincidence or event; God's action is in charge of making it possible. At the beginning of the book, it could be deduced that the divorce and its consequent result of the search for a new wife, was all planned by God, to "make room" for the Jewish people in the Persian empire, to make Mordechai occupy at the end of history the position of noble empire, or the creation of an important feast for the Jewish people, such as the Feast of Purim, which commemorates the salvation of the latter from destruction. Another situation is that by chance, Mordechai gets to hear precisely the dialogue of two officers about a conspiracy against the king. Going on, another example is Mordechai's faith that everything will go well when Esther tells King Xerxes about her Jewish identity, as well as Haman's plans to destroy the Jews.

As I mentioned before, God is not mentioned in this biblical book. However, it can be seen how, in different situations, he appears to guide the characters in making decisions and to give them the most favorable options. God actuates in this story as an index of everything that will happen in the story, and that will lead to the salvation of Jewish people, the continuation of the Messiah lineage, and the creation of the Purim (Festival of Lots). God tends to appear in this book in every situation that seems to happen as a matter of coincidence. For example, it is never mentioned that King Xerxes had troubles to sleep, however, the night before Esther's feast, when she was going to reveal to him that she was Jewish and that Haman wanted to kill every Jew, King Xerxes could not fall asleep easy. This problem of not being able to rest that night led King Xerxes to remember the man, Mordecai, who saved his life earlier when his own people conspired against him. Also, the fact that he could not sleep supposed the gesture of honor given to Mordechai. At the same time, that situation led to the contribution of increasing Mordechai's reputation amongst the Persian people, and was the precursor to the execution of Haman, after knowing of Haman's plans to annihilate all Jews. Another example of God's presence in the book of Esther is when Mordechai realized that Esther could be the solution that could set an end in the decree against Jewish. Another example is the situation by which Mordechai found out the conspiracy against King Xerxes. He was just sat down there, and suddenly he heard the two officer's conspiracy against the King. It is like God knew that it was going to happen and influence in Mordechai's action to just simply sit down on the door. It seems like Mordechai was in the exact place at the exact moment. Instead, it was God's decision that made it happen, to lead Mordechai and Esther, the only two Jewish people that will be able to save His people of a terrible end.