

Esther Series

Revised – August 2010

Good News Bible Studies

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Haman's Plot

Esther 3

An Ironic Turn of Events (Esther 3:1-6)

1. “After these events King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and established his authority over all the princes who were with him” (Esther 3:1)
 - The story continues and the writer uses the phrase “**after these events**” which means that the events that take place in chapter three follow sometime after the notable uncovering of the assassination plot against King Ahasuerus by Mordecai and the subsequent execution of the two plotters (**Bigthan** and **Teresh**).
 - 1) Esther was made queen sometime in the 7th year of the reign of Ahasuerus and the events of chapter 3 date sometime around the 12th year of the reign of Ahasuerus.
 - 2) Some time has passed and we are introduced to the 4th significant person found in the book of Esther and his name is _____.
 - What do we know about **Haman**?
 - 1) Some commentators draw the conclusion that he was from the lineage of **King Agag** who was the leader of the Amalekites (I Samuel 15:8). The Amalekites were bitter enemies of the Israelites.
 - 2) Other commentators conclude that Agag was simply a Persian province and Haman was from that area.
 - We aren't really told why Haman receives such a significant promotion (*maybe it was by deception*), but later the King has second thoughts about it. (Esther 6:1-3)

2. “All the kings’ servants who were at the kings’ gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman; for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage” (Esther 3:2)

- Haman’s promotion was a significant one and his new position was probably close to what we might consider a _____ of a country or empire.
 - 1) This authority was evidenced by the requirement of the kings’ command to pay homage and respect to Haman. Basically all of the kings’ servants were to bow down to him.
 - 2) This promotion clearly inflates the ego and pride of Haman as we will see in the following verses.
- Mordecai flat _____ to submit and does not bow down to Haman, nor does he pay him homage.
 - 1) Some commentators suggest that this refusal to bow down to Haman had something to do with Mordecai’s knowledge of Haman’s lineage (possibly a descendant of **King Agag**, an **Amalekite**) and that there was some sort of an unsettled “family feud” that existed between the two of them.
 - 2) Some commentators conclude that Mordecai just had a general lack of respect for Haman and could see through his hypocrisy and arrogance.
 - 3) Some commentators conclude that Mordecai’s actions were similar to Daniel’s when Daniel was faced with the requirement to bow down to Darius and he too chose not to. (See Daniel 6)
- Whatever reasons that Mordecai had for refusing to bow down to Haman; his actions will cause a significant problem and a diabolical response by Haman.
- Later on in the book of Esther we will read; “Then Haman went out that day glad and pleased of heart, but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king’s gate and that he did not stand up or tremble before him, Haman was filled with anger against Mordecai” (Esther 5:9). This evidences the _____ of Haman and his continued hatred toward Mordecai.

3. “Then the king’s servants who were at the king’s gate said to Mordecai, why are you transgressing the king’s command? Now it was when they had spoken daily to him and he would not listen to them, that they told Haman to see if Mordecai’s reasons would stand; for he had told them that he was a Jew. When Haman saw that Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage to him, Haman was filled with rage. But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him who the people of Mordecai were; therefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus” (Esther 3:3-6)

- Initially Haman may have had little to do with Mordecai and unless there was some sort of family feud or rivalry between the two, Haman may have not even known who Mordecai was.
 - 1) The text shows us that it was the king’s _____ that brought the offense by Mordecai to the forefront. Their motivation could have been jealousy (very similar to what Daniel experienced – Daniel 6) or maybe they were testing the system to see if there were any loopholes.
 - 2) It was the fact that Mordecai was a **Jew** that became the central point of the problem and also of the entire story of this book. It is rather ironic but the word “Jew” is a **polarizing** word for people not just in our day but throughout history.
- The king’s servant’s motivation for revealing Mordecai’s heritage may have been the result of strong anti-Semitic (Jewish) attitudes of the people in Shushan; which may explain why Mordecai was reluctant to allow Esther to tell her true ethnic background. (see Esther 2:10)
 - 1) The Jews in Shushan (the Persian winter palace) were those descendants from the people of Judah who were taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and exiled to Babylon. After the Jews were permitted to return to Jerusalem (by the Persian King Cyrus) there were some who remained behind.
 - 2) It is possible that the king’s servants were not as “friendly” toward those Jews who remained behind and as such decided to seize an opportunity by letting Haman know of Mordecai’s heritage. We are not told why Mordecai chose to tell them, but things will rapidly change for the worse for the Jews in Persia.

An Interesting Twist of the Facts (Esther 3:7-9)

1. “In the first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, Pur, that is the lot, was cast before Haman from day to day, and from month to month, until the twelfth month, that is the month Adar” (Esther 3:7)
- Let’s define and understand a few things:
 - 1) About 4 years has gone by since Esther had become Queen
 - 2) The first month (Nisan) falls around the time we celebrate spring (Mar/April) and would have been the normal time that the Jews celebrated the Passover.
 - 3) The casting of lots (Pur) was a common method used by the Persians (who were very superstitious) to seek an omen or sign that would provide direction and guidance as to what to do in a particular situation.
 - 4) Many cultures (including Hebrew/Jewish culture) used a similar method of “casting lots” or “drawing straws” as a means to determine God’s will.
 - 5) The twelfth month (Adar) falls around our months (Feb/Mar)
- What Haman is doing (according to the writer) by seeking an omen (casting of lots), was to allow fate and chance to create an opportunity to make a move against Mordecai and to destroy the entire Jewish people.
 - 1) The month that was chose to do this was the month of Adar (Feb/March) which was one year later.
 - 2) The plan that Haman had put together was an elaborate and diabolical plan to annihilate the Jewish race and he had a year to put it all together.
- While Haman had put this elaborate scheme to annihilate the Jews, **God was at work** and He had prepared the way to deliver the Jews from this evil plot.
- Can you name some other Biblical examples or your own personal examples where God has delivered His people or you from harm?

2. “Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, there is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of all the other people and they do not observe the king’s laws, so it is not in the king’s interests to let them remain. If it is pleasing to the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who carry on the king’s business, to put into the king’s treasuries” (Esther 3:8-9)

- Haman needed the king’s approval in order to pull off this diabolical plan so he went to King Ahasuerus and twisted his story enough so that the king would give his blessing and allow Haman’s plan to be put in place:
 - 1) The “certain people” that he is speaking of are the _____ that are not just in Susa but also spread throughout the 127 provinces of the Persian Empire. This would also include those Jews who returned to Jerusalem and living there.
 - 2) It is a true statement that **“their laws are different”** in that if they were fully obedient to the Mosaic Law, there would be things they would refrain from doing and there would be things they would do that would not be commonly practiced among the Persians.
 - 3) It would even be true that if the king’s laws would put them in a position to violate the Mosaic Law, then it would also be true that they may choose not to observe the king’s laws. A good example would be Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.
- Up to this point in story, the only violation that we see is Mordecai’s refusal to bow to Haman:
 - 1) Yet he built this scheme to destroy the entire Jewish race because of one man’s refusal to bow before him and he convinced the king to allow it.
 - 2) This serves as a good reminder of the wickedness of man’s heart!
- Haman must have acquired a large amount of wealth as he was offering the king 750,000 pounds of silver (worth millions in current dollars), as payment to those who carry out this task. Ironically the king doesn’t make Haman pay it. (Vs. 11)

An Inconceivable and Treacherous Plot (Esther 3:10-15)

1. “Then the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. The king said to Haman, the silver is yours and the people also, to do with them as you please” (Esther 3:10-11)
 - In some of the previous passages that we have read (Esther 1:16-22, 2:2-4), it appears that the king is easily influenced by his advisors and officials.
 - In this particular case he will give in to the wishes of Haman (although later he will regret it – Esther 8:5-7). He will sign off on this diabolical act by giving his signet ring (his official signature) to Haman to do as he wishes.
 - Haman is now identified by the writer of this book as “the _____ of the Jews” and this identifying mark will stick with him. (Esther 7:6, 8:1, 9:10, 9:24)
 - Why do you suppose the king didn’t keep the silver?
2. “Then the king’s scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and it was written just as Haman commanded to the king’s satraps, to the governors who were over each province and to the princes of each people, each province according to its script, each people according to its language, being written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king’s signet ring. Letters were sent by couriers to all the king’s provinces **to destroy, to kill and to annihilate all the Jews**, both young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to seize their possessions as plunder” (Esther 3:12-13)
 - This proclamation carried the full authority of the king and it called for the _____ of all Jewish people (including women and children).
 - It was a diabolical plan put together by Haman himself to _____ the Jewish race (God’s covenant people) from the face of the earth. This included the confiscation of all property owned by Jews.
 - Do we have any similar modern day examples of this type of treachery?

3. “A copy of the edict to be issued as law in every province was published to all the peoples so that they should be ready for this day. The couriers went out impelled by the king's command while the decree was issued at the Citadel in Susa; and while the king and Haman sat down to drink, the city of Susa was in confusion” (Est. 3:14-15)

- I have a few of observations about this text:

- 1) There seems to be complete _____ by Haman that his position with the king was secure enough to casually sit with the king and have a drink while the rest of the empire was in a state of war and confusion as his thugs prepared to annihilate God's chosen people.
- 2) The king appears to be completely _____ and unconcerned as to the outcome or perhaps he liked the idea of ridding his empire of the Jews.
- 3) The people themselves were in a state of _____ which says to me that they (a pretty sophisticated society) probably had not experienced such ruthless bloodshed before. Perhaps some other minorities within the kingdom might even have feared that they would be next.

- The decree went throughout the entire empire and the inconceivable and treacherous plot was put into motion:

- 1) All _____ would be annihilated
- 2) It would take place in _____ day
- 3) The month that it would occur was _____ which was roughly 11 months from the issuance of the edict. (Historians calculate the date as **March 7, 443 BC**)
- 4) The _____ of the Jews would go to the empire

4. The next chapter (Esther 4) lays out how Mordecai will let Esther know of Haman's plot and Mordecai's plea to her to appeal to the king to stop the bloodshed. Stay tuned to see what is in store and how the Lord will intervene and provide a way of escape.