




For Such A Time As This

THE STORY OF ESTHER AND MORDECAI

Part III – A Tale of Two Paths
(Good vs Evil)
Esther 3-4



First - some very
important information!

Mordecai uncovers a plot to kill the king

“When the virgins were assembled a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king’s gate. But **Esther had kept secret her family background and nationality just as Mordecai had told her to do**, for she continued to follow Mordecai’s instructions as she had done when he was bringing her up. During the time Mordecai was sitting at the king’s gate, **Bigthana and Teresh**, two of the king’s officers who guarded the doorway, **became angry and conspired to assassinate King Xerxes**. But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai. And when the report was investigated and found to be true, the two officials were impaled on poles. **All this was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the king.**”
(Esther 2:19-23)





Several Noteworthy Items worth mentioning

From - Esther 2:19-23

- Given that Esther was now Queen – it is easy to conclude that Mordecai may have held some sort of prominent position in the Persian government.
- It might explain why he was “sitting at the Kings gate” and able to overhear this plot to kill the King
- In the same way that Daniel was given a position of prominence (through Divine providence) in the Babylonian Kingdom – it was probably the same for Mordecai.

“Moreover, at Daniel’s request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court” (Daniel 2:49)



This passage (Esther 2:19-23) reveals that Esther followed Mordecai's guidance and she chose to keep her Jewish heritage a secret:

- We are not told the reason at this point, but we will see as the book unfolds that there is animosity and hatred toward the Jews in the Persian kingdom
- Things were changing for the Jews during this time and some of the “special” considerations and protections from the days of the Babylonian Empire under king Nebuchadnezzar and the early days of the Persian Empire under King Cyrus were diminishing.
- Mordecai (perhaps by God's revelation) apparently was aware of this shift, and he made this a part of Esther's training.



We are not told in this passage (Esther 2:19-23) as to why the two eunuchs (Bigthan and Teresh) became angry at the king and set out to kill him but here are some possibilities:

- They may have become disenchanted with the king and changed their allegiance to someone else
- They may have objected to the removal of Vashti as queen

Mordecai informs Esther, she informs the king; the plot is investigated and found to be true:

- The two men are hanged (possibly impaled on a pole or shaft) and the event is even recorded in the Persian record book
- Mordecai doesn't receive a promotion for uncovering this plot but (as we will see) he will reap a huge reward later.



What lessons can we learn:

- Mordecai and Esther were both patient on the Lord and their **obedience** and **discipline** will pay off as we will see in the remaining chapters
- Perhaps this is a good lesson for us to realize the value of **waiting** on the Lord and not forcing our will on the circumstances. As we will see, God had better plans for them



Haman's Plot Eradicate/Eliminate the Jews

Esther 3

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

“After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles.

All the royal officials at the king’s gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor. Then the royal officials at the king’s gate asked Mordecai, “Why do you disobey the king’s command?” Day after day they spoke to him, but he refused to comply. Therefore, they told Haman about it to see whether Mordecai’s behavior would be tolerated, for he had told them he was a Jew. When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. Yet having learned who Mordecai’s people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead, Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai’s people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.



“After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles.”

(Esther 3:1)

- The events that take place in chapter 3 follow sometime after the notable uncovering of the assassination plot against King Xerxes by Mordecai
- Esther was made queen sometime in the 7th year of the reign of Xerxes and the events of chapter 3 date sometime around the 12th year of the reign of Xerxes
- We are now introduced to the 4th significant person found in the book of Esther and his name is **Haman**



What do we know about Haman's background – what made him so evil?

- Some commentators draw the conclusion that he was from the lineage of **King Agag** (Haman's father is called an Agagite) who was the leader of the Amalekites (I Samuel 15:8). The Amalekites were bitter enemies of the Israelites
- 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 we will read later in (Esther 6:1-3) that the King has second thoughts about it.



“All the royal officials at the king’s gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor” (Esther 3:2)

- Haman’s promotion was a significant one and his new position was probably close to what we might consider a **Prime Minister** of a country or empire
- This authority was evidenced by the requirement of the kings’ command to pay homage and respect to Haman
- 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



“Then the royal officials at the king’s gate asked Mordecai, “Why do you disobey the king’s command?” Day after day they spoke to him but he refused to comply. Therefore they told Haman about it to see whether Mordecai’s behavior would be tolerated, for he had told them he was a Jew” (Esther 3:3-4)

- 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
- Daniel experiences similar hatred/animosity from some of the leaders of the Medo/Persian empire who caused Daniel to be thrown in the lion's den during the reign of Darius. (Daniel 6)



When Haman saw that **Mordecai would not kneel down** or pay him honor, he was enraged. Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead, **Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people**, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes (Esther 3:5-6)

- There may have been a of strong anti-Semitic (Jewish) attitudes of the people in Shushan which is probably the reason Mordecai initially told Esther not to share that detail yet
- The Jews living in Shushan (the Persian winter palace) were those descendants from the tribe of Judah who were initially taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and then exiled to Babylon. During the reign of King Cyrus, they were permitted to return to Jerusalem, but some remained behind in Persia, and they were not liked by all.



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

In the twelfth year of King Xerxes, in the first month, the month of Nisan, the pur (that is, the lot) was cast in the presence of Haman to select a day and month. And the lot fell on the twelfth month, the month of Adar. Then Haman said to King Xerxes, “There is a certain people dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king’s laws; it is not in the king’s best interest to tolerate them. If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will give ten thousand talents of silver to the king’s administrators for the royal treasury.”





Several Noteworthy Items worth mentioning

From - Esther 3:7-9

- ✓ About 4 years has gone by since Esther has become Queen
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ 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
- ✓ Many cultures (including Hebrew/Jewish culture) used a similar method of “casting lots” or “drawing straws” as a means to determine God’s will
- ✓ 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
- ✓ The month that was chosen to do this was the month of **Adar** (Feb/March) which was one year later
- ✓ 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



“There is a certain people dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king’s laws; it is not in the king’s best interest to tolerate them” (Esther 3:8)

- Haman needed the king's approval as the “certain people” that he is speaking of are the **Jews** that are not just in Susa but also spread throughout the 127 provinces of the Persian Empire.
- Haman 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 which is a good reminder of the wickedness of man’s heart.



“If it pleases the king, **let a decree be issued to destroy them**, and I will give ten thousand talents of silver to the king’s administrators for the royal treasury.” (Esther 3:9)

- 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
- What other time/s in world history have we witnessed similar “genocidal” acts such as this?
- Why – what causes mankind to harbor and foster such hatred and murder of the innocent?



An Inconceivable and Treacherous Plot (Esther 3:10-12)

“So, the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. “Keep the money,” the king said to Haman, “and do with the people as you please.” Then on the thirteenth day of the first month the royal secretaries were summoned. They wrote out in the script of each province and in the language of each people all Haman’s orders to the king’s satraps, the governors of the various provinces and the nobles of the various peoples. These were written in the name of King Xerxes himself and sealed with his own ring.”



An Inconceivable and Treacherous Plot (Esther 3:13-15)

“Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king’s provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews—young and old, women and children—on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods. A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so they would be ready for that day. The couriers went out, spurred on by the king’s command, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered.”





Several Noteworthy Items worth mentioning

From - Esther 3:10-15

- ✓ 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 enemy 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?



“Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king’s provinces with the order to **destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews**—**young** and **old**, **women** and **children**—**on a single day**, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods” (Esther 3:13)

- This proclamation carried the full authority of the king and it called for the **death** of all Jewish people (including women and children).
- It was a diabolical plan put together by Haman himself to **eliminate** the Jewish race (God’s covenant people) from the face of the earth. This included the confiscation of all property owned by Jews



- There seems to be complete **confidence** 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
- The king appears to be completely **indifferent** and **unconcerned** as to the outcome.
- The people themselves were in a state of **confusion** which says to me that they (a pretty sophisticated society) probably had not experienced such ruthless bloodshed before.
- The month that it would occur was **Adar** which was roughly 11 months from the issuance of the edict. (Historians calculate the date as **March 7, 443 BC**)





Chosen For An
Unexpected
Calling

Esther and Mordecai



“When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. But he went only as far as the king’s gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing.

Many lay in sackcloth and ashes” Esther 4:1-3)

- Mordecai may have felt personally responsible for this decree that was issued to annihilate the Jews
- It is entirely possible to assume that Mordecai knew that something like this would come about and why for so long he deemed it necessary to keep a low profile as to he and Esther’s Jewish heritage
- Perhaps Mordecai realizes that without Divine intervention, the potential results looked grim for him and the other Jews



“When Esther’s eunuchs and female attendants came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. Then Esther summoned Hathak, one of the king’s eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why” (Esther 4:4-5)

- Any direct communication between Mordecai and Esther might have put her in jeopardy so she used her trusted liaison’s (her maidens and eunuch’s)
- Mordecai declined Esther’s offer of proper attire for the king’s palace and perhaps it was to get his point across as to the seriousness of the matter



“So Hathak went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king’s gate. Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to instruct her to go into the king’s presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.”
(Esther 4:6-8)

- Esther and Mordecai must have had a high level of trust in God and a high level of trust in Hathak (his name which is derived from the Persian word **hataka** means “**good**”) as this was a pretty big risk that they were taking.
- This boldness exemplified great faith that the Lord will protect them no matter what the circumstances they face.
- Mordecai completely discloses Haman’s plot to kill the Jews and instructs Esther to use her influence with the king to plead for the lives of her people.



“Hathak went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, “All the king’s officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king.”
(Esther 4:9-11)

- Upon receiving this news from Mordecai – Esther was faced with a real dilemma:
 - ✓ Access to the king was strictly controlled probably to protect him from assassins and unnecessary burdens
 - ✓ Esther needed an appointment, and she wasn’t on his calendar, so the next best thing was for the king to acknowledge her with his golden scepter
 - ✓ It’s possible that Esther had been out of favor with the king, so this request potentially put her life at risk



When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:12-14)

- Mordecai's response to Esther is pretty straightforward:
 - ✓ Esther was a Jew and ultimately, she would suffer the same punishment as the rest. **She couldn't just ignore the problem and think it would go away**
 - ✓ He expressed total **confidence** that God would deliver the Jews.
 - ✓ He closes out his remarks by saying that it is very possible that this is the **reason** you were made Queen – to save your people from annihilation!



Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: “Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.” So, Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther’s instructions. (Esther 4:15-17)

- Notice Esther’s courage to accept the challenge
 - ✓ She calls for her people to fast
 - ✓ Take note of Esther’s response – “**If I perish, I perish!**” I see this as courage, and you can find a similar courage displayed by Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the Book of Daniel - chapter 3



Concluding thoughts

From - Esther 4:12-17

It seems that Esther may well have been hemmed in by her circumstances:

- ✓ This might be something many of us can relate to in our struggles of life as our circumstances can often get us off track
- ✓ Sometimes we need a fresh reminder as to who is in control and the Lord will often use those same circumstances or the counsel of other people to bring us around to realize He is in control
- ✓ How do you handle serious or uncomfortable circumstances that happen in your life?

