



Disciplers Bible Studies

HAMAN'S PLOT ESTABLISHED -- CHAPTERS 3 & 4

INTRODUCTION

In these two chapters we begin to see why God, in His providence, had elevated Esther to the throne of Persia. A crisis is about to arise in the kingdom. We are introduced to the evil Haman, a man with an evil heart against the people of God, a man bent upon destroying all the Jews. No one in the palace knows that Esther is Jewish. In obedience to Mordecai, her cousin who raised her, she has been keeping this a secret. Haman does not know her secret, and even her husband the king does not know. But soon the opportune time will arise for the secret to become known.

Outline of Esther 3 and 4

- I. Haman's Promotion - Esther 3:1-4
- II. Haman's Rage - Esther 3:5-6
- III. Haman's Plot - Esther 3:7-15
- IV. Mordecai's Mourning - Esther 4:1-3
- V. Mordecai's Appeal to Esther - Esther 4:4-17

I. Haman's Promotion - Esther 3:1-4

After these things refers back to the events of the previous chapter where Mordecai uncovered a plot against King Ahasuerus, reported it to Queen Esther, and consequently saved the king's life. However, the king had neglected to reward Mordecai and even promoted another man, Haman, to be the chief (similar to what we would call a prime minister) of all the princes in the realm.

- A. Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite - Esther 3:1

Some commentators have conjectured that Haman, an Agagite, was descended from King Agag of the Amalekites, an ancient nomadic people, first mentioned in the Bible in Genesis 14:7. The Amalekites were fierce fighters who had attacked the Israelites soon after they had been delivered from slavery in Egypt. Because of their evil intent toward His people, God had promised that He would *utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven* (Exodus 17:14). Through the years, the Amalekites had continued to be enemies of the Jews. It would be quite appropriate for evil Haman, the Agagite, to be descended from the royal family of the Jews' arch enemies. However, King Agag had been put to death by Samuel (1 Samuel 15:33), and the Bible records that the remnant of the Amalekites were destroyed by the tribe of Simeon (1 Chronicles 4:43), fulfilling the word

of God in Exodus 17:14. From archeological findings, it is known that Agag was also the name of one of the provinces in the Persian Empire. It is more probable that Haman was known as an Agagite because he was from that particular province. Also, Haman's father's name, Hammedatha, is Persian, and all ten of Haman's sons had Persian names (Esther 9:7-10). These facts make it unlikely that Haman was an Amalekite.

- B. Homage required - Esther 3:2-4

The king had commanded that all his servants in the capital of Shushan bow down and pay homage to Haman, the new prime minister. Mordecai had a position as judge at the gates of the city, and when Haman passed by, it was expected that Mordecai would bow in homage. Everyone else went down on their hands and knees, but Mordecai refused. As a Jew, Mordecai was obligated to observe the Law of God rather than the law of men. Jews bowed down before their own kings (2 Samuel 14:4; 18:28; 1 Kings 1:16) but they honored God. When the Persians bowed before their kings, they honored them as gods. For Mordecai to bow before Haman would be to do homage to him as to a god. It would be idolatry. God had specifically warned Israel against idolatry and bowing down to anyone or anything other than to Him (Deuteronomy 6:13-16 and 2 Kings 17:34-39). In refusing to bow down to Haman, Mordecai was standing up for God. In what ways do you refuse to bow to the ways of the world and choose to stand for God instead?

II. Haman's Rage - Esther 3:5-6

In these verses, we begin to see what kind of man Haman really was. He could not stand the fact that Mordecai refused to bow to him. Even though everyone else in the capital showed deference to him, it aggravated him to no end that one man, Mordecai, did not. Haman was a small-minded man with an oversized ego and he could not shake the vexation of Mordecai ignoring him. *Haman was filled with wrath* (Esther 3:5).

When Haman discovered that Mordecai was a Jew, his wrath extended to encompass all the Jews throughout the kingdom of Ahasuerus, in all one hundred and twenty-seven provinces. This would also have included those Jews who had returned to their homeland to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem under the edict of Cyrus the Great. Judea was a part of the Persian Empire at this time. Haman's evil plot was to destroy all the Jews in the empire.

III. Haman's Plot - Esther 3:7-15

Five years had passed since Esther had been crowned queen. It was now the twelfth year of Ahasuerus' reign (474 B. C.). The month was Nisan, the first month of the Jewish calendar year.

A. Pur cast - Esther 3:7

Being a superstitious man, Haman consulted magicians or astrologers to obtain help in ascertaining the best time to carry out his plot against the Jews. They cast the *pur*, an old Persian word which means "lot". A lot is an object, such as dice, used to make a determination or choice. The Bible says, *the lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord* (Proverbs 16:33). God set the date, eleven months later.

B. King petitioned - Esther 3: 8-9

With the evil plot and the date of its execution in mind, Haman's next step was to present his plan to the king. His argument for the destruction of the Jews was subtle: a mixture of truth, lies, omission of pertinent details, and bribery. He first brought to the king's attention the fact of a particular group of exiles in the land. There were many different nationalities living within the Persian Empire, but Haman did not mention the specific people to which he referred. Neither did the king inquire. Haman's proposition concerning the Jews consisted of four main points.

1. *Their laws are different from all other people's.*

This was true. The Jews lived under God's Law. However, the Persian kings prior to Ahasuerus had encouraged all exiles in the land to continue to practice their own respective religions. None of them had been concerned with religious law and practice interfering with the laws of Persia.

2. *They do not keep the king's laws.* This was a lie. The Jews were law abiding people who were respected by their neighbors. We have seen that Mordecai even had a job within the Persian justice system. The only law that had been broken was by Mordecai in his refusal to bow down to Haman.

3. *It is not fitting for the king to let them remain.* This was Haman's own personal sentiment born out of his desire for revenge. The irony here is that the king's own wife was a Jew and she would be included in Haman's wicked plan.

4. *Let a decree be written that they be destroyed and I will pay 10,000 talents of silver into the hands of those who do the work, to bring it into the king's treasuries.* This was an outright bribe. If the king would issue a decree to destroy the people, Haman would pay the

king a huge amount of money. A Persian talent weighed 66 pounds. 10,000 talents of silver would amount to upwards of \$15,000,000 today!

C. King's response - Esther 3:10-11

1. Signet ring - 3:10

Ahasuerus did not question Haman or press for details. Nor did he care to identify the nationality of the people whom Haman wished to destroy. He took off his signet ring and gave it to Haman, *the enemy of the Jews* (Esther 3:10 and also 7:6; 8:1; 9:10 and 24). The signet ring was the seal of official power. When impressed upon clay or wax, the ring made a special imprint which would have been recognized throughout the empire as the seal of royal authority. The possession of the ring gave Haman free reign to make decrees and send them out in the king's name.

2. Silver and Jewish subjects - 3:11

The king refused the 10,000 talents of silver which Haman had offered as a bribe, but gave him power over the people, his subordinate subjects, without even knowing who they were. Haman's evil heart must have raced within him when he realized the extent of the power given to him to carry out his revenge. Haman's intent was totally wicked, and what irony there is in the king's words, *do with them what seems good to you*. It is obvious that there could be no good in Haman's vindictive scheme.

D. Edict sent - Esther 3:12-15

Haman wasted no time in having the king's scribes prepare the decree. It was then translated into the various languages of the people living within the vast Persian Empire. It was sent out in the king's name, sealed with the king's signet ring, to be issued as law in every province. The decree called for the total destruction and annihilation of all the Jews, young and old, including little children and women. The people of the land were to be ready for that day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar. They were to be prepared to kill and confiscate the property of every Jew. This plan bears a remarkable resemblance to the horrors in modern history devised by Adolf Hitler, who, like Haman, was an enemy of the Jews.

As the decree was being proclaimed in the city of Shushan, the people were aghast. Never before had such a cruel and unjust edict been issued. What were the reasons behind it? The Jews were not their enemies. The Jews were their neighbors, their friends, and their business associates. If the king would do such a thing to the Jews, whom might he single out next? The city was bewildered, anxious, and fearful for the future.

But up in the palace, two godless men, Ahasuerus and Haman, sat down to drink.

IV. Mordecai's Mourning - Esther 4:1-3

When Mordecai learned about the decree he was overwhelmed with grief. He realized that his refusal to bow to Haman had caused a crisis for all his people. As was the Jewish custom when in mourning, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth (a coarse material made of goats hair), and cried out with a loud and bitter cry. This he did in the public square outside the king's gate. "Mourning was not allowed inside the citadel so as not to upset the king. Persian kings did not tolerate sorrow or tragedy in their presence" (The Wycliff Bible Commentary, Moody Press).

As the edict arrived in the other provinces, all the Jews took up the mourning, with fasting, weeping, and wailing. Many also clothed themselves in sackcloth and ashes. "Although the writer does not mention it, this type of mourning was not just a formal outward show as often took place at Jewish funerals. Communal mourning, with fasting, weeping, and the wearing of sackcloth and ashes expressed grief and terror such as would inspire repentance and prayer before God" (Esther, Joyce G. Baldwin, IVP). Mordecai and all the Jews realized the threat of total destruction of God's chosen people. They knew the promises God had made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David of the promised Messiah and the blessing of all peoples through the Jews. The grim realization that God's plan would be undermined through carrying out of the king's edict would surely have led to more than just a formal, superficial mourning.

V. Mordecai's Appeal to Esther - Esther 4:4-17

In the palace, Esther had no knowledge of what had transpired between Haman and her husband, Ahasuerus. Sheltered in luxury and safety as the royal queen, she was unaware of the evil decree which had caused such terror in the hearts of her people.

A. Esther's inquiry to Mordecai - Esther 4:4-6

When Esther heard from her servants about the Jews mourning and Mordecai sitting in the square in sackcloth and ashes, she became distressed. Her first response was to send Mordecai new clothes so he could remove his sackcloth, but Mordecai refused to accept. Esther then called a trusted servant, Hathach, and sent him to question Mordecai about what he was doing and his reasons behind his actions.

B. Mordecai's reply to Esther - Esther 4:7-9

Mordecai told Hathach the whole story of how Haman,

incensed at his refusal to bow down to him, had turned his fury upon all the Jews. He told Hathach how Haman had bribed the king with a promise of 10,000 talents of silver for his treasuries. Mordecai also gave Hathach a written copy of the decree which Haman had issued in the king's name, calling for the destruction of the Jews. Mordecai told Hathach to show the decree to Esther and explain it all to her. Most importantly, he demanded that she use her influence with the king to plead for her people (Esther 4:8). The secret which Mordecai had told Esther to keep would be a secret no longer. In referring to the Jews as her people, Mordecai revealed Esther's heritage. As a Jew, not even the Queen of Persia would be exempt from Haman's hateful decree.

C. Esther's excuse - Esther 4:10-12

When Esther heard about all that had happened and what Mordecai wanted her to do, she was surely in a quandary. Of course, she wanted to help her people and Mordecai who had raised her, but what about her own life? Everyone knew that the law prohibited anyone from going into the king's inner court without being summoned by him personally. This had been a law among the Medes and Persians from early times, enacted to protect the king and to exalt his honor and dignity in the eyes of his subjects. Anyone who approached the king without being called faced certain death unless the king happened to be in a particularly gracious frame of mind and extended his golden scepter. As his wife, Esther had not been called into the king's presence for thirty days. Certainly this would not be the most opportune time to approach him and attempt to make supplication for her people.

Esther had a valid excuse to ignore Mordecai's command. To go before the king would be to risk her life. At first sight of her, Ahasuerus could give the command for his servants to take her away and put her to death. It was definitely not beyond him. Consider what he had done to Vashti. If the king had Esther put to death, she would be of no use to her people at all. Perhaps it would be better to wait until the king called for her again and then she could plead her case. Is it easy for you to rationalize when God calls you to a difficult task? Do you find every excuse you can, and when you can't find excuses, make them up? What excuses are keeping you from following through with what God wants you to do?

D. Mordecai's challenge to Esther - Esther 4:13-14

Mordecai's answer to Esther consisted of three arguments. First, he reminded her that she was a Jew. Even in the king's palace she would not be able to escape destruction under the evil decree. Secondly, Mordecai was sure that God would deliver His chosen

people and not permit their extinction. God's plan would be fulfilled no matter what. Esther could choose whether or not she would be a part of it. If she refused to help, God would have another way and Esther and her family would face His judgment. Thirdly, wasn't it quite possible that God had raised Esther to be Queen of Persia for this very purpose? Wasn't it possible that God had singled her out and put her in this unique position where she could be the one to influence the king and divert disaster for her people?

Mordecai's argument conveyed to Esther his strong confidence in God's promises and in His power to protect and direct the lives of individual people. All Jews knew from their history that God continually guided and protected His people. They knew of the over-ruling power of God working behind the scenes in worldly events for those He had chosen as His. They had seen it in their recent history when King Cyrus of Persia had issued a decree for the Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their temple (Isaiah 45:1; Ezra 1:1-3). God watches over and protects His people. It was true in Esther's and Mordecai's day, and it is true today, as verified in God's word. See Psalm 37:28; Isaiah 12; Isaiah 27:1-6; John 10:28; Philippians 4:7; 2 Thessalonians 3:3; and 1 Peter 1:3-5.

E. Esther's decision to go before the king - Esther 4:15-17

Esther's answer to Mordecai's challenge shows her faith in God. She would go to the king, but Mordecai must gather all the Jews of Shushan to fast for her for three days. She does not mention prayer, but throughout the Old Testament fasting is linked with prayer as a means of humbling oneself before God and showing the sincerity of one's prayer. Around 800 B. C., the prophet Joel had called the Jews to pray and fast and seek God (Joel 1:14). Daniel had fasted and prayed when seeking God (Daniel 9:3). Approximately twenty years after Esther became queen, Ezra and the Jews

who returned with him to Jerusalem prayed and fasted before their journey (Ezra 8:21-23). Nehemiah prayed and fasted (Nehemiah 1:4). Jesus' apostles prayed and fasted (Acts 13:3; 14:23). Surely the Jews of the city would not have gathered to fast without praying for Esther and the courageous task she had promised to undertake for them.

In the palace, Esther and her maid-servants would fast as well. Now that the secret of her nationality had been revealed, Esther could openly pray and seek God's guidance and strength for the task to which He had called her. At the end of three days Esther would go before the king, in the face of the Persian law, and in her own words, *if I perish, I perish!* Esther literally put her life into the hands of God. She knew that He had cared for her as an orphan, providing a loving cousin, Mordecai, to take her in. God had been with her in the king's harem, providing preferential treatment by the king's eunuch. He had been with her when her turn had come to go in to the king. The king had fallen in love with her and taken her as his queen. God had been with her all these years in the palace, providing favorable treatment by all the king's servants. God had provided for her every need. Surely God would provide and protect her as she went before the king to make supplication for her people.

Application

As you look at your life, how has God provided for you? As you see His hand of provision and protection in your life time and again, can you now put your trust in Him for the future? Will you commit your life to Him as Esther did and go forward knowing that God will fulfill His plan through you as you trust Him and obey Him? Will you tell God, as our Lord Jesus Christ did in the Garden of Gethsemane as He agonized in prayer before facing His arrest, trials, and crucifixion, *not my will, but Yours be done* (Luke 22:42)?