Ester (Esther) ~ Part 3

The main plot of the book of Ester begins to unfold in Ester 3:1–15. The narrative prior to this point has been setting up events before vv. 1–6 and the developments that follow. In contrast with **Mordekhai's** unrewarded service to the **King** (2:19–23), **Haman** is honored, even though the narrative hints that he should be dishonored (vv. 1, 4). By the time the narrative reaches v. 7, more than four years have passed since **Ester** became **Queen** (2:16). The events of 2:19–23 and 3:1–6 occur sometime during this period.

Haman's Plan to Kill the Jews

3 [1] Sometime later, King Achashverosh began to single out Haman, the son of Hamdata the Agagi, for advancement; eventually he gave him precedence over all his fellow officers.

A descendant of **Agagi**, **King** of the **Amalekites**, **Isra'el's** ancient enemies (Exodus 17:8–16). **Agagi** was defeated by **King Saul** and killed by the prophet **Samuel** (1 Samuel 15:1–33). The conflict between **Haman** and **Mordekhai** mirrors the earlier conflict between their ancestors, **Saul** and **Agagi**.

[2] All the King's servants at the King's Gate would kneel and bow down before Haman, because the King had so ordered. But Mordekhai would neither kneel nor bow down to him. [3] The King's servants at the King's Gate asked Mordekhai, "Why don't you obey the King's order?" [4] But after they had confronted him a number of times without his paying attention to them, they told Haman, in order to find out whether Mordekhai's explanation that he was a Jew would suffice to justify his behavior.

According to **Herodotus**, bowing to superiors was a normal part of **Persian** court etiquette rather than an act of worship (cf. Genesis 23:7; 1 Kings 1:16). **Mordekhai** did not bow because **"he was a Jew."** The text does not give any more reason for **Mordekhai**'s refusal to bow, but given **Haman's** ancestry and animosity toward the **Jews**, **Mordekhai** apparently felt he could not bow to him without compromising his identity as a **Jew**. It is also possible that Haman was claiming some kind of divine status and **Mordekhai** refused to give him that kind of honor. **Mordekhai** did the very thing he had told **Ester** not to do in her situation (Ester 2:10, 20).

[5] Haman was furious when he saw that Mordekhai was not kneeling and bowing down to him. [6] However, on learning what people Mordekhai belonged to, it seemed to him a waste to lay hands on Mordekhai alone. Rather, he decided to destroy all of Mordekhai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole of Achashverosh's Kingdom.

Mordekhai's refusal to bow gave **Haman** the opportunity to reveal his hatred of the **Jews** by setting out to destroy them all. This included **Yerushalayim** and the surrounding area with its mainly Jewish population (see 1:1; cf. Neh. 1:1–3). **Haman** exemplifies all who oppose **God's** people, and especially **Satan** (see Rev. 12:10–12).

[7] In the first month, the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of Achashverosh, they began throwing pur (that is, they cast lots) before Haman every day and every month until the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar.

The first month of the **Jewish Religious calenda**r, which began in spring with the **Pesach** (Exodus 12:1–2). While the **Jews** prepared to celebrate their deliverance from Egypt, Haman plotted their destruction. The twelfth year. Cf. Est. 2:16; **Haman** has been biding his time for five years. **Pur**. The **Persian** word for **"lot,"** from which the term *purim* ("lots") is derived (9:26). **Cast lots.** A traditional way of seeking divine guidance (Joshua 18:6; Proverbs 16:33) or, as here, finding the most opportune time to do something.

[8] Then Haman said to Achashverosh, "There is a particular people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your Kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every other people; moreover, they don't observe the King's laws. It doesn't befit the King to tolerate them. [9] If it please the King, have a decree written for their destruction; and I will hand over 330 tons of silver to the officials in charge of the King's affairs to deposit in the royal treasury."

Haman cleverly began his presentation to **Achashverosh** by starting with the truth (*"There is a particular people scattered and dispersed among the peoples*) and ending with a lie (*they don't observe the King's laws*). His offer to give the crown **330 tons of silver** to pay for an empire-wide extermination may have encouraged **Achashverosh**, whose coffers had been depleted by the war with the **Greeks**. The magnitude of the gift is apparent if one uses **Herodotus's** (a **Greek** historian of the fifth century B.C.) estimate of the **Persian King's** income; such a gift from **Haman** would represent over half of the annual income of the **Persian Empire**. Yet the king may have refused the offer (v. 11), although both **Mordekhai** and **Ester** assumed he accepted it (4:7; 7:4).

[10] The King took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman the son of Hamdata the Agagi, the enemy of the Jews. [11] The King said to Haman, "The money is given to you, and the people too, to do with as seems

good to you.”[12] The King’s secretaries were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month. They wrote down all Haman’s orders to the King’s army commanders and governors in all the provinces and to the officials of every people, to each province in its own script and to each people in their own language; everything was written in the name of King Achashverosh and sealed with the King’s signet ring.[13] Letters were sent by courier to all the royal provinces "to destroy, kill and exterminate all Jews, from young to old, including small children and women, on a specific day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to seize their goods as plunder.”[14] A copy of the document to be issued as a decree in every province was to be publicly proclaimed to all the peoples, so that they would be ready for that day.[15] At the King’s order the runners went out quickly, and the decree was issued in Shushan the capital. Then the King and Haman sat down for a drink together, but the city of Shushan was thrown into confusion. [1]

The instructions were clear: all **young and old, women and children** were to be destroyed, killed, and annihilated (v. 13). The terrible decree was to be executed 11 months later, on the **thirteenth day of Adar**. Critics charge that such a decree, implemented almost a year later, is ludicrous, since people would have had ample time to flee. But the **Jews** were dispossessed exiles whose lives depended on the **King’s** good pleasure. Had they picked up to flee, undoubtedly the genocide would have been triggered early, for their fleeing would have been seen as an attempt to evade the King’s decree.

As **Haman** plotted evil against **Ester** in this chapter without accountability, reflect on how we sometimes face negative influences in our lives, such as selfishness or gossip among family members. This week, take time to assess the impact of these influences in your household. Schedule a family meeting where everyone can openly discuss feelings, struggles, and how to support each other against negativity. Encourage everyone to pray together, seeking accountability and fostering a spirit of kindness and support within your family that mirrors **Yeshua's** love.

[1] Ester 3:1-15.