

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

SEPTEMBER 10TH - 11TH, 2022 // BOOK OF ESTHER

HAMAN (ESTHER 3:1-6)

"AFTER THESE THINGS..." (VS. 1)

King Ahasuerus, the ruler of the Persian empire, has chosen Esther (a Jewish girl who has concealed her ethnicity) to be his queen (2:15-18).

- Esther's cousin, Mordecai, **hears about an assassination plot against the king** and conveys it to Esther, who **informs the king and saves his life** (2:21-23).

We would expect now to read that Mordecai was honored and given homage, but instead, that honor is given to a man named, "Haman, the Agagite..." (vs. 1).

- Any Jew reading this can see the injustice. Not only is Mordecai not honored, but the honor goes to an Agagite: a descendent of the Amalekites, who were **the ancient enemies of the Jews and the God of Israel**.

The Amalekites had **set themselves against God and His people as far back as the Exodus**, when they attacked Israel in the rear ranks (Deut. 25:18).

- Joshua fought against the Amalekites (Ex. 17:8-16), and God commanded **King Saul to destroy the Amalekites** (1 Sam. 15).
- Haman's **irrational hatred of the Jews might be connected with this long, violent history**.

Not only is **Mordecai passed up and his honor given to someone who hates the Jews** and their God, but a law is passed that commands that everyone must bow to this man: something Mordecai simply refuses to do (vs. 2-4).

- There doesn't seem to be a **biblical command against bowing** or paying homage to a political leader as a sign of respect (Genesis 18:2; 23:7; 43:26; Exodus 18:7; 2 Samuel 16:4).

Mordecai must have **known something about Haman, which persuaded him that Haman** was unworthy of such honor.

- Haman's pride is wounded by **Mordecai's refusal to bow, but when Haman discovers that Mordecai is a Jew**, things become unglued (vs. 5-6).
- Because **Mordecai the Jew disrespects him**, Haman comes to the conclusion that **every single Jewish person in the world must die**.

The demonic irrationality of racial prejudice and hatred has led people to come to the strangest and most barbaric conclusions concerning people in other ethnic groups.

- It's these kinds of rationale that have justified things like lynching, unjust laws, **the Bosnian genocide** (1992-1995, 8,000 non-Serbians), **the Rwandan genocide** (1994, 662,000 Tutsi deaths), and **the Holocaust** (1941-1945, 6,000,000 Jews).

A DEADLY PLOT (ESTHER 3:7-15)

It was the **12th year of the king's reign**, some five years after Esther's coronation as queen.

- According to Persian custom, **lots were cast in the first month of the year** to determine the future and fortunes of the year.
- Haman, **so overcome and twisted by his demonic hatred**, is sadistically casting lots to determine a day and month that year for the annihilation of the Jews (vs. 7).

The casting of the lot **determined that the Jews would not be attacked and massacred** for at least 11 months.

- This proves the truth of **Proverbs 16:33**: "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD."
- There is **no such thing as coincidence!** The delay between the first month and the month of the massacre was ordained by God.

Having chosen the day, **Haman heads to the palace** to see the king.

- Haman's charge against the Jewish people is serious, but it's an **exceptionally cunning and manipulative charge** (vs. 8).
- Haman doesn't tell the king who these people are—he keeps them **unnamed and impersonal and just says that they don't obey the king's laws (no proof, just Haman's word)**.

Haman tells the king that it is **not in his best interest to keep them around**, but of course, he gives the king no evidence for this claim.

- Then he offers the king **what was essentially a bribe** (vs. 9)—the 375 tons (or 10,000 talents) of silver wouldn't come from Haman's own pocket; **it would be obtained from the property of the slaughtered Jews!**
- The king asks no questions and agrees (vs. 10-11).

This royal decree **concerning the destruction, death, and annihilation of every Jew** is then published throughout the entire Persian empire (vs. 12-15).

- Imagine being a **Jew in the Persian empire** at that time.
- You receive word that on a date 11 months from now, you, your entire family, and everyone in your community will be **rounded up and killed**.

"THE KING AND HAMAN SAT DOWN TO DRINK..." (VS. 15)

When the king sat down to drink, **he thought he had done well**—but he didn't really understand what he had done.

- Haman also sat down to drink and thought he had done well—and **he knew exactly what he intended to do**
- The **city of Susa (and presumably the rest of Persia)** was in confusion and turmoil.

MOURNING (ESTHER 4:1-3)

When the Jews in Susa heard the tragic news, the **entire city was thrown into confusion**.

- Mordecai learns what has occurred and responds by **tearing his clothes, putting on sackcloth and ashes, crying, and weeping bitterly** in the middle of the city (vs. 1).
- We have to remember that **Mordecai's actions in refusing to bow to Haman** were the cause behind this edict being issued.

The character of the laws of the Persians was that they couldn't be **changed** once decreed (1:19).

- The finality and hopelessness of this situation had set in across every province of the empire, where **the Jewish people collectively fasted, wept, lamented, and lay in sackcloth and ashes** (vs. 3).
- The law of the land prohibited anyone in mourning from **entering the King's Gate** (vs. 2). Ancient royalty lived in **artificial paradises that sheltered them** from the realities of life.
- Those within the palace lived **easy, comfortable, and entertaining lives** completely disconnected from the sufferings of those outside the King's Gate.
- How many of us, as American Christians, are guilty of the same kind of **apathy and indifference** to the suffering of others in our world?

"And it's true we are immune/When fact is fiction and TV reality/And today the millions cry/We eat and drink while tomorrow they die."—U2, "Sunday Bloody Sunday"

- Suffering due to **extreme global poverty**.
- Suffering due to **moral decay, abuse, negligence, evil, and pervasive wickedness**.
- Future **eternal suffering** facing those in our world who don't know Jesus.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matthew 5:4).

- Those who understand **the true weight of our depravity** and the hopelessness of our situation as human beings without God will only have one response—**mourning**.

- And only when **we're truly sorry for sin can the grace of God** be introduced into the picture, and we can "be comforted" by the solution—**Jesus**.

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS (ESTHER 4:4-17)

Queen Esther gets word that **her adopted father is deeply distressed and lying outside the gate** of the palace, mourning in sackcloth and ashes (vs. 4).

- Instead of sending someone to ask him **what was wrong and how possibly she could help**, she sends him some clothes to wear instead of the sackcloth (vs. 4b).
- It seems like **Esther has changed a bit**.

After Mordecai refused Esther's gift of clothes, she sent one of the eunuchs to find out what was going on (vs. 5-6).

- Esther, living in the isolation of the palace, had not **yet been made aware of this decree**.
- Mordecai explains it thoroughly to Esther's messenger (vs. 7) and **even sends a copy** of the decree to her, challenging her to intercede on behalf of her people before the king (vs. 8-9).

The **difficulty behind Esther interceding for her people** before the king was that she was only allowed to come to the king when called. If she came on her own, **she could be executed for approaching the king** without an invitation.

- She **hadn't been summoned for 30 days**: apparently, life as the queen wasn't one of great intimacy with the king (the king never slept alone, as there were other **concubines in the harem**).

Mordecai's response is more urgent: **he reminds Esther that her life is also in danger**, even if she does live in the palace.

- Mordecai also tells Esther that if she doesn't act, **"relief and deliverance will arise from the Jews from another place."** Mordecai's trust was in the faithfulness of God, not Esther. **He knew God would fulfill His promises to Israel**, even if Esther didn't obey.

God doesn't need you and I, but **He's invited us to be a part of His work in the world**.

- If we "**keep silent**" and **refuse to obey Him**, God will raise up others to save His people.
- But **God wants to use us to accomplish** His purposes in the world! He's inviting us!
- Are we willing to **wake up from a stupor of worldliness**, indifference, and apathy, remember who we are, and join God in His mission?

"FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS..." (VS. 14)

Mordecai knew that God had promoted this orphan in exile for a reason—and **Esther needed to have the courage and wisdom** to see that reason and fulfill it.

- Esther then decides to step into her destiny and **fulfill her purpose**—she would make a bold appearance before the king to rescue her people, even if it meant death (vs. 15-17).

WE THEN SEE A TURNING POINT IN ESTHER'S CHARACTER.

She calls for every Jew and all of her female servants to **fast and pray with and for her as she prepares to go before the king** (vs. 16).

- Fasting is the **ultimate symbol of humility and reliance on God** for sustenance and life.
- Esther seems to know and understand that if **God doesn't act and give her favor with the king**, there's no hope for her or any of the Jews.

THERE IS AN ENEMY WORSE THAN HAMAN.

- Our enemy is described as a **roaring lion prowling the earth and seeking for those to devour** (1 Peter 5:8).
- He's a **deceiver, an accuser, and a destroyer**.
- He is bent on **deceiving, distracting, discouraging, and absolutely destroying** you.
- He wants **you (and all of humanity)** in Hell with him because that's where he's spending his eternity.
- His **wicked plan to turn humanity against God and God against humanity** was enacted in Genesis 3.

THERE IS A SENTENCE GIVEN TO HUMANITY THAT IS WORSE THAN DEATH.

- "**The wages of sin is death**" (Rom. 6:23), "**the lake of fire...is the second death**" (Rev. 20:14).
- The decree that has been issued upon humanity is **rightly deserved: we have all sinned against an infinitely holy God**, and we all deserve **eternal separation and punishment from Him** because of our rebellion and wickedness.

THERE IS A MEDIATOR BETTER THAN ESTHER.

- Like **Mordecai and the Jews**, we can't get access to the King on our own: **we need a mediator with access to God** who will plead with Him on our behalf.
- Jesus didn't just **risk His life to save us: He gave His life to save us**.
- Jesus didn't just **save us from destruction: He made a way for us to now have access to God**.
- **Have you trusted in the only mediator between God and humanity, the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5)? Are you willing to mourn for the hopelessness of this world without God** and fix your eyes on your only hope: **Jesus?**
- **Are you willing to join God's invitation to be used by Him for His purposes in the world? "For such a time as this."**