

SBC – Aug. 15, 2021
Esther 3:1-7 (NKJV)
“Haman’s Conspiracy Against the Jews”

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Slide # 1

Theme: God’s providential Care For His People

Outline:

Chapter 1 – Queen Vashti Deposed

Chapter 2 – Esther Becomes Queen

Chapter 3 – Haman’s Plot Against the Jews

Chapters 4-7 Esther’s Courage – Haman’s Plot Backfires

Chapter 8 The Jews Avenged

Chapter 9 The Feast of Purim Instituted

Chapter 10 Epilogue – Mordecai Exalted

“I am so great an enemy to the book of Esther, that I wish it had not come to us at all, for it has too many heathen unnaturalities.”

– **Martin Luther**

Although many Bible teachers make Mordecai and Esther out to be great heroes of the faith, that is questionable. Some go the other way and claim they weren’t even really saved. Perhaps the truth lies somewhere in between. They may or may not have been believers but they were certainly compromised.

Nehemiah’s prayer in Neh. 1:5-11 gives a good indication of the spiritual lethargy among the Jews who remained in exile in Persia.

Slide # 2

Nehemiah 1:7 (NKJV)

7 We have acted **very corruptly** against You, and have **not kept the commandments, the statutes, nor the ordinances** which You commanded Your servant Moses.

This story of Esther takes place in 483-473 B.C. in Persia. Many of the Jews remained in the land of Persia after the time of the Babylonian Captivity even though the Persian king Cyrus through an edict had in effect told them to go home in 538 B.C.

The powerful king Ahasuerus had deposed his number one queen wife named Vashti. A replacement was found in the person of Esther who happened to be a Jewish girl – but she had kept that a secret in keeping with her cousin Mordecai’s charge.

We pick up the narrative at 3:1...

Esther 3:1–7 (NKJV)

1 After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him.

This is about 4 years after Esther had become queen. At this time king Ahasuerus promoted Haman. And note the emphasis “promoted” – “advanced him”, and “set his seat above all the princes who were with him.” This meant that he had the second highest position in the kingdom – right under the king himself.

Note it says here that he was an Agagite. Scholars debate what this means. It could mean he was a descendant of Agag the king of Amalek whom king Saul refused to kill (see 1 Sam. 15:20). But others claim it means he was from a Persian area called Agag claiming it “unlikely” that a high-ranking Persian official would be related to Agag from 500 years previous.

But I would note when human intellect starts saying, “unlikely” it may very well be likely with God. I think the story line argues more for him being a descendant of Agag. For one thing it further qualifies him as being “the son of Hammedatha which would indicate we are talking about heritage.

Admittedly it is not definitive but I think it probable that what we have in this story reflects the ongoing tension and conflict between Haman’s ancestors and the Jewish ancestors of Mordecai.

When the Jews came out of Egypt the Amalekites attacked Israel as seen in Ex. 17:8-16. We read there...

Slide # 3

Exodus 17:16 (NKJV)

16 for he said, “Because the LORD has sworn: the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.”

God was very serious about this and gives more detail through Moses.

Slide # 4

Deuteronomy 25:17–19 (NKJV)

17 “Remember what **Amalek** did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt,

18 how he met you on the way and **attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you were tired and weary; and he did not fear God.**

19 Therefore it shall be, when the LORD your God has given you rest from your enemies all around, in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance, that you will **blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. You shall not forget.**

So about 500 years later when God told Saul (the first king of Israel) to go and wipe out the Amalekites He was serious. He hadn't forgotten and He expected that His people hadn't either. However, Saul only did a partial job sparing the king of the Amalekites who was called Agag – whom Samuel than hacked to pieces (cf. 1 Sam. 15).

Therefore, some of the Amalekites continued to exist (cf. 1 Chron. 4:42-43) and very possibly Haman was a descendant of king Agag – the Amalekite king. He very probably knew the one thousand year “bad blood” history between his people the and the Jews and Mordecai most probably would also have known it. So here they were 500 years later in the context of this pagan king Ahasuerus who ruled over the Persian Empire and in that context this “bad blood” once again comes to the forefront.

2 And all the king's servants who were within the king's gate bowed and paid homage to Haman, for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai would not bow or pay homage.

All the king's servants in the context of the royal court bowed and paid homage to Haman which was in accordance with the king's command. But Mordecai refused. He would not bow or pay homage.

Now some claim that the motive for Mordecai's refusal to bow was because it was tantamount to worship and therefore in conflict with Exodus 20:5 where God indicates His people in worship are not to bow before any other.

People taking this view claim that the words “bow” and “pay homage” when used together often indicate worship (cf. 2 Chron. 7:3; 29:29; Ps. 95:6). So, this is possible.

But there are some problems with that view. Number one is that Mordecai up to this point did not seem to have great scruples regarding the law. He seemingly overlooked lots of passages related to immorality and the marriage of Esther to the pagan king Ahasuerus. So, are we to think that of the sudden he now has great convictions regarding the letter of the law. That is very questionable.

Second, the Jews historically had no problem bowing in respect before authoritative figures as they made a clear distinction between this and worship (cf. Gen. 23:7, 33:3, 44:14; 1 Sam. 24:8; 2 Sam. 14:4; 18:28; 1 Kg. 1:16). For example, when Joseph the Hebrew was made second in command in the land of Egypt they cried “Bow the knee!” before him (Gen. 41:43). It was not considered sacrilegious. There is nothing in the text that indicates this was worship. Rather, it has to do with Haman’s newly exalted position of honor and prestige that was now paid to him as second in the kingdom.

So, I take it that the emphasis on Haman being an Agagite in combination with bowing down to him and paying homage was just too much for Mordecai to handle. Knowing the history of the Amalekites and how God calls for them all to be blotted out was just too much. He couldn’t do it. Mordecai just could not bow and pay homage to such a fellow who represented the perennial enemy of his people – the JEWS!

Slide # 5

Only the long-standing enmity between the Jews and the Amalekites accounts both for Mordecai’s refusal and for Haman’s intent to destroy all the Jews. – ***The NIV Study Bible***

3 Then the king’s servants who were within the king’s gate said to Mordecai, “Why do you transgress the king’s command?”

Everyone else was bowing and making Haman out to be this great person – that is everyone except Mordecai. So they asked him about it. And in particular they made the issue about “the king’s command” which is truly the great issue in this context.

It was one thing not to bow to Haman but to do it in disobedience to the king's command – now that puts it on a whole other level. That puts the defiant person's life in jeopardy – that is if word of this gets back to the king.

4 Now it happened, when they spoke to him daily and he would not listen to them, that they told it to Haman, to see whether Mordecai's words would stand; for Mordecai had told them that he was a Jew.

Mordecai's peers pressured and pestered him day in and day out. When everyone is doing something it does tend to put pressure on the one that is not doing it. Peer pressure is a powerful thing.

In an experiment designed to test the power of group pressure to enforce conformity, groups of nine students sat in assigned seats. All were shown cards with a single line on the left side and 3 lines on the right side. They were to determine which line on the right was equal in length to the single line on the left. The first eight students had been told ahead of time to select a line that was clearly wrong. Would the ninth student buck the group and go along with the right choice or not? Amazingly, very often, even though it was clearly wrong the student would vote with the majority even though they were making an obvious wrong choice. Such is the power of peer pressure!

So, whatever the motives, you have to give Mordecai some credit here. There was some internal fortitude here. He wasn't bending no matter the pressure. There was serious resolve here. I take it Mordecai would rather die than bow before Haman.

Finally, he told them it was because he was a Jew. Notice his religious convictions are not mentioned – merely his Jewish heritage.

It might be assumed his Jewish scruples informed by the law are involved but that is not stated (cf. Deut. 6:13-14). I think the better argument is that Jewish pride was involved based on the 1000 year "bad blood" history that is view.

So, these fellow servants decided to really test Mordecai's Jewish principles to see if they would really stand up under pressure. They informed Haman that one of them was not bowing!

5 When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow or pay him homage, Haman was filled with wrath.

This is pure ego on display. He was filled with wrath simply because he was not given the recognition that he wanted. Wrath and ego often go together.

6 But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him of the people of Mordecai. Instead, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus—the people of Mordecai.

To disdain something is to treat it with contempt for scorn. To Haman this was a bigger deal than just Mordecai. This whole narrative is bigger than just a couple of individuals. It has whole people groups in view.

Mordecai had told his peers he was a Jew and they had relayed this to Haman. And his reaction would indicate he some knowledge of the Jewish people – and he hated them. He saw in Mordecai what he believed was indicative of the Jews mindset in general. So, in Haman’s mind it was too small a thing to just go after Mordecai – he wanted all the Jews dead – every last one of them.

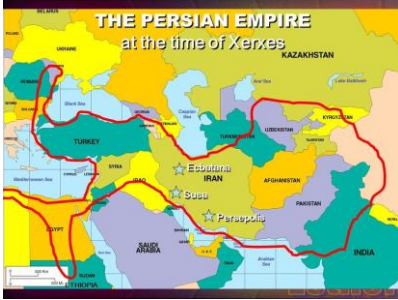
Thus we see the spirit of Antisemitism that drove Hitler clearly operative here. One can clearly see Satan at work in the shadows here.

It is perfectly clear, then, that the titanic death-struggle of the book of Esther simply cannot be understood apart from the satanic purposes toward Israel which the general context of Scripture reveals (cf. 10:18-11:1; Eph. 6:12). – ***John Whitcomb***

Instead of merely putting Mordecai to death, which probably would have been relatively easy to do since he plainly defied the king's command in front of all the king’s cabinet, instead of merely Mordecai, Haman plotted to seek the death all the Jews in the whole entire empire.

Now realize the kingdom was extensive and took in not only those Jews in exile but also those who had returned home to the promised land which was also under the rule of Persia at this time.

Slide # 6



Just like Hitler Haman was plotting to kill as many Jews as possible – hopefully all of them. His ego was so BIG that for the insult of one Jewish man he wanted to kill off the whole race of the Jewish people.

Haman was full of hate. And hate is a killer. And when that is addressed to God’s chosen people that is a major problem because it really demonstrates rebellion against Israel’s God Who alone is the one true God.

A massive execution of all the Jews would kill off God’s program and covenant promises to the patriarchs. Such would thwart the program of God. But that is not possible!

Slide # 7

Job 42:2 (NKJV)

2 “I know that You can do everything, And that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You.

Psalms 115:3 (NKJV)

3 But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases.

Daniel 4:35 (NKJV)

35 All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven And among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, “What have You done?”

Plainly said God is UNSTOPPABLE AND UNACCOUNTABLE! When you are God you can do whatever, you want and no one can stop you. Thankfully He is a GOOD God and His character is perfectly consistent with His holiness, love, truth, faithfulness, and grace.

7 In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, the lot), before Haman to determine the day and the month, until it fell on the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar.

This happened on the first month in the 12th year of Ahasuerus – which would have been in 474 B.C. Esther became queen in the king's 7th year – so about 4 or 5 years had gone by since she became queen.

In this 12th year they cast Pur (which is say the lot) before Haman to determine the exact time they should begin to carry out the plan to execute the Jews.

Haman, and the Persian people generally were very superstitious people (cf. 6:13). Scholars point out that the Persian religious system emphasized fate and chance. So it would appear that Haman here was allowing “fate” to determine the date when this murderous plan would be carried out. The roll of the dice (so to speak) would determine the minds of the gods.

And as they did so the lot fell on the 12th month which is the month of Adar.

How “lucky” for the Jews – NOT! Luck had nothing to do with it! The fact that the lot fell on the 12th month was the providence of God. This could not have been more favorable for the Jews because it gave time for Haman's plot to be overcome and for a counter-decree to be issued.

How ironic that the first month of the Jewish Calendar (Nisan) begins the Jewish new year with the celebration of Passover which is a memorial of God's deliverance of His people from Egypt. Right at that very time Haman was plotting their demise. He obviously learned nothing from history!

Haman did not realize that it is the God of Israel who controls all things – including the lot that is cast.

Slide # 8

Proverbs 16:33 (NKJV)

33 The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD.

God providentially determined this favorable casting of the lot. It wasn't just lucky or a coincidence (cf. Lev. 16:8; Jos. 18:6; Neh. 11:1).

The word “Pur” was an Assyrian word meaning “lot” referring to something that is cast in order to make a decision (cf. Isa. 34:17; Neh. 10:35; 1 Chron. 26:14; Ps. 22:19; Jon. 1:7; Prov. 18:18). The plural “Purim” is the word used to denote the Jewish feast commemorating the Jewish deliverance from wicked Haman – which is still celebrated today.

Providence has a lot to do with timing – God’s perfect timing of events that brings about His exacting purposes.

No Purim would have meant no Israel (theoretically) and no Israel would have meant no Messiah and no Messiah would mean no Christianity. Clearly in one fashion or another God had to intervene – and He providentially did as seen even in the lot that was cast.

Warren Wiersbe astutely writes: “***When God isn’t permitted to rule, He overrules, and He always accomplishes His purposes.***”

Indeed He does: He always accomplishes His purposes and often His providential hand brings it about!