

Esther 03 - Haman Promoted; Mordecai Refuses to Bow; Haman Plans to Eradicate the Jews

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Esther 3

- (4) Haman's plan to eradicate the Jews (3:1-15)
 - (A) Ahasuerus promotes Haman (3:1)

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1 Sometime later King Ahasuerus promoted Hammedatha the Agagite's son Haman, elevating him to a position above all the other officials who were with him.

1 After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him.

- A break of some years separates Esther 2-3

- "...Agagite" - Agag was also the title of the anti-Semitic Amalekite king whom King Saul failed to execute (1 Sam 15:8; Cf. Ex 17:8-16; Num 24:7)

- Both Kish (2:5, Saul's father) and Agag, the Amalekite king were heirs to a long-standing tradition of anti-Semitism. This led to the anti-Semitism of Haman.
- "...promoted him" - Haman was promoted to the office of prime minister of the Medo-Persia empire

(B) Mordecai's refusal to bow down to Haman (3:2-4)

- 2 All the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman; for so the king had commanded regarding him. But **Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage.**
- 2 All the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman; for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage.
- 2 All the king's ministers who were in the king's gate would kneel and bow down to Haman, because the king had commanded that Haman be honored in this way. Mordecai, however, would not kneel and would not bow down.
- 2 And all the king's servants, that were in the king's gate, bowed, and reverenced Haman: for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence.
- "...Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage" - Haman's promotion meant that the other nobles had to kneel down to him, that is, they had to pay him special respect. This was somewhat similar to what was commanded of the three Hebrew young men in Dan 3:8-15.
 - It is not clear why Mordecai refused to bow down or pay homage to Haman, but it could be due to the long-standing animosity between Jews and Amalekites
 - It could also be due to his desire to honor God, but there are several examples of Jews bowing down before high government officials, including kings, in the OT (Cf. Gen 23:7; 43:28; Ex 18:7; 2 Sam 14:4; 18:28; 1 Kings 1:16,23). Mordecai did not have to worship Haman (Cf. Dan 3:17-18) as not even Persian kings demanded worship of their people.
 - However, it's likely that Mordecai refused to recognize and honor Haman because he knew of his deep-seated anti-Semitism and he was a known enemy of the Jews. Once it became known to Haman that Mordecai was a Jew (v4), Haman wanted to exterminate all the Jews, not just Mordecai (v6) probably because he believed that none of the Jews would pay honor to him.
- 3 Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why are you violating the king's command?"
- 3 Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why are you transgressing the king's command?"

3 The king's ministers who were in the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why are you disobeying the king's command?"

3 Then the king's servants, which were in the king's gate, said unto Mordecai, Why transgressest thou the king's commandment?

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

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

4 They asked him this day after day, and he would not listen to them, so they told Haman to see whether or not Mordecai would get away with his disobedience, since he also had told them that he was Jewish.

4 Now it came to pass, when they spake daily unto him, and he hearkened not unto them, that they told Haman, to see whether Mordecai's matters would stand: for he had told them that he was a Jew.

- "...he was a Jew" - Mordecai "came out of the closet" to others at the gate regarding his heritage. He identified himself as one of the despised captives, risking everything.

(C) Haman's rage culminating in his ambition to eradicate the Jews (3:5-6)

5 When Haman saw that Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage to him, Haman was **filled with rage**.

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5 When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel and bow down to him, he flew into a rage.

5 And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath.

- "...filled with rage" - an indicator of his extreme pride and prejudice

6 But he considered it beneath his dignity to kill Mordecai alone, for they had told him *who the people of Mordecai were*; so Haman sought to **annihilate all the Jews**, the people of Mordecai, who *were found throughout the kingdom of Ahasuerus*.

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

6 Because they had told him who the people of Mordecai were, Haman found it unacceptable to kill only Mordecai. So Haman sought to destroy all of Mordecai's people, the Jewish people, who were in all the kingdom of Ahasuerus.

6 And he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had shewed him the people of Mordecai: wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai.

- "...annihilate all the Jews" - Satan's strategy through Haman becomes clear. Haman may have been successful in executing Mordecai alone, but when he decided to wipe out the race of people that God chose to bless, he embarked on a course of action that would inevitably fail (Cf. Gen 12:3).

— Haman's goal to exterminate all Jews would include those in the land of Israel and throughout the huge Persian Empire, many of whom were faithful to the Lord, worshiping in the rebuilt temple and living according to the stipulations of the Law (Cf. Ezra 1-6). The timing of this event is between Ezra 6-7, before the time of Nehemiah.

— Haman possessed all seven character traits that God hates (Cf. Prov 6:16-19): a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren.

(D) Haman's specific plan to eradicate the Jews (3:7-15)

(a) Lot determines date of eradication (3:7)

7 In the **first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year** of King Ahasuerus, Pur, that is the lot, was cast before Haman **from day to day and from month to month**, until the twelfth month, that is the month Adar.

7 In the first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, Pur, that is the lot, was cast before Haman from day to day and from month to month, until the twelfth month, that is the month Adar.

7 In the twelfth year of the reign of King Ahasuerus, in the first month (the month Nisan), the pur (that is, the lot) was cast in Haman's presence to determine the best day and month to carry out his plot. The lot indicated the twelfth month, the month Adar.

7 In the first month, that is, the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of king Ahasuerus, they cast Pur, that is, the lot, before Haman from day to day, and from month to month, to the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar.

- "...first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year" - April/May 474 BC, four years after Esther had become queen. This was one day before Passover.

- "...Pur" - Haman used a *pur*, a Persian word for the lot, to decide when the Jews should be killed

- The *pur* is the basis of the name of the Feast of Purim (Cf. 9:26), which celebrates the deliverance of the Jews by God from Haman's scheme
- The word *pur* has come to light on a die from the reign of Shalmaneser III of Assyria (858–824 BC), confirming the detail given in v7
- "...from day to day and from month *to month*" - at the beginning of a new year in the Persian Empire, lots were cast to determine significant dates for various events in the empire
- The Persian religious system stressed fate and chance. Haman was allowing fate, by the casting of the lot, to dictate his move against the Jewish nation. The Persians were very superstitious. It was unthinkable at that time to make plans of this magnitude without astrological guidance.
- "...The lot indicated the twelfth month, the month Adar" - the lot that was cast to determine when the extermination of the Jews would begin, and controlled by God (Cf. Prov 16:33), fell on the month of Adar (February/March), nearly a year later.
- The day, (stated later in v13), was the 13th of the month (Cf. 8:12; 9:1), which gave the Jews nearly a full year to prepare to defend themselves

Prov 16:33: The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD.

(b) Haman petitions Ahasuerus to issue the decree calling for the eradication of the Jews (3:8-9)

8 Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a **certain people** scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from *those* of all *other* people and they do not comply with the king's laws, so it is not in the king's interest to let them remain.

8 Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from *those* of all *other* people and they do not observe the king's laws, so it is not in the king's interest to let them remain.

8 Then Haman told King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered and divided among the people throughout the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different than all the other people, they don't obey the king's laws, and it's not in the king's best interest to leave them alone.

8 And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them.

- "...certain people" - referring to the Jews, including those rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem
- It's likely that Haman did not mention the Jews by name because Ahasuerus' predecessors, Cyrus and Darius, had issued proclamations favorable to the Jews (Cf. Ezra 1:1-4; 6:3-5,8-12)
- His failure to be specific set him up for Esther's revelation that it was her people, the Jews, that Haman planned to destroy (Cf. 7:4)
- The Jews did live a separated life (Cf. Num 23:9) and did have their own laws, as Haman said, but they were not a dangerous or rebellious element within the empire, which he claimed they were (Cf. Jer 29:7).
- Haman accused the Jews, en masse, of treason when just the opposite was true. This was just another notorious instance of an unjustified attempt at "ethnic cleansing."

9 If it is pleasing to the king, let it be decreed that they be eliminated, and I will pay **ten thousand talents of silver** into the hands of those who carry out the *king's* business, to put into the king's treasuries."

9 If it is pleasing to the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who carry on the *king's* business, to put into the king's treasuries."

9 If the king approves, let it be decreed that they're to be destroyed, and I'll measure out 10,000 silver talents and bring it to the king's treasury for those who will do the work."

9 If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed: and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries.

- Haman told the king that he himself was willing to bear the costs involved in carrying out this decree. He may have been a man of immense wealth, however he was likely also factoring in the wealth he would confiscate from the Jews he planned to exterminate.

— His offer to Ahasuerus was akin to a bribe

- "...ten thousand talents of silver" - amounted to two-thirds of the empire's annual income. The annual income of the entire Persian Empire was 15,000 talents of silver [Herodotus, Bk III, §95].

— The King may have exhausted his resources with his disastrous war against Greece and may have been desperate or looking to replenish his treasury.

(c) Ahasuerus calls for the decree mandating the eradication of the Jews
(3:10-11)

10 Then the king took his **signet ring** from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews.

10 Then the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews.

10 The king removed his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Hammedatha the Agagite's son Haman, the enemy of the Jewish people.

10 And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews' enemy.

- "...signet ring" - the imprint of the king's signet ring was the equivalent of his signature in ancient times (8:2,8,10; Cf. Gen 41:42). Giving his signet ring to Haman was his approval to move forward with the extermination of the Jews and the confiscation of their wealth.

11 And the king said to Haman, "The silver is yours, and the people *also*, to do with them as you please."

11 The king said to Haman, "The silver is yours, and the people *also*, to do with them as you please."

11 The king told Haman, "The silver is given to you, along with the people, to do with them as you see fit."

11 And the king said unto Haman, The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee.

- This probably means that King Ahasuerus was putting Haman in charge of the project, not that all the confiscated money would be his to keep

(d) Ahasuerus' scribes pen the decree (3:12)

12 Then the king's scribes were summoned on the **thirteenth day of the first month**, and it was written just as Haman commanded to the king's satraps, to the governors who were over each province and to the officials of each people, each province according to its script, each people according to its language, being written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet ring.

12 Then the king's scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and it was written just as Haman commanded to the king's satraps, to the governors who were over each province and to the princes of each people, each province according to its script, each people according to its language, being written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet ring.

12 The king's scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and all that Haman commanded was written to the regional authorities of the king, to the governors who were over each province, and to the officials of each people. This order was translated in the name of King Ahasuerus into the language of each province and bore the seal of the king's signet ring.

12 Then were the king's scribes called on the thirteenth day of the first month, and there was written according to all that Haman had commanded unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors that were over every province, and to the rulers of every people of every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language; in the name of king Ahasuerus was it written, and sealed with the king's ring.

- "...thirteenth day of the first month" - the edict decreeing the destruction of the Jews was sent throughout the empire on the 13th day of the first month, the day before Passover.

This would've been April 17, 474 BC (see note: **Key Dates in Esther** in 8:9).

(e) Decree disseminated throughout the empire (3:13-15a)

13 Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces to **annihilate, kill, and destroy** all the Jews, both young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to seize their possessions as plunder.

13 Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces to destroy, to kill and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to seize their possessions as plunder.

13 Letters were sent by couriers to all of the king's provinces to annihilate, to kill, and to destroy all the Jewish people, both young and old, women and children, and to confiscate their goods on a single day—the thirteenth day of the twelfth month of Adar.

13 And the letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to take the spoil of them for a prey.

- "...annihilate, kill, and destroy" - likely the legal verbiage used by Haman in the edict; the legal formula used would have been as specific as possible

- Haman's proclamation, sent out under the king's name to all the provinces and in various languages (Cf. 1:22), called for the death of all Jewish people including women and children. Haman intended to rid the world of God's covenant people.

— Also the executioners were ordered to confiscate property owned by Jews

- The Persian system of posts consisted of arrangements very similar to the famed "Pony Express" with fresh horses and riders day-distanced, with conveyance even continuing in the night, etc.

— This system stationed throughout the empire to ensure swift communication [Herodotus v.14; viii. 98]. They were able to get information throughout the empire very quickly.

- The fact that the edict went out a full 11 months prior to the beginning of the genocide gave the Jews ample time to prepare. This is evidence of God's grace toward the Jews.

14 A copy of the edict to be issued as law in every province was published to all the peoples so that they would be ready for this day.

14 A copy of the edict to be issued as law in every province was published to all the peoples so that they should be ready for this day.

14 A copy of the letter was to be issued as an edict in every province and published to all the people, telling them to be ready for that day.

14 The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province was published unto all people, that they should be ready against that day.

(f) Confusion created by the decree (3:15b)

15 The couriers went out, speeded by the king's order while the decree was issued at the citadel in Susa; and while the king and Haman sat down to drink, the city of Susa was agitated.

15 The couriers went out impelled by the king's command while the decree was issued at the citadel in Susa; and while the king and Haman sat down to drink, the city of Susa was in confusion.

15 The couriers went out, urged on by the king's command, and the edict was issued in Susa the capital. The king and Haman sat down to drink, while the city of Susa was thrown into confusion.

15 The posts went out, being hastened by the king's commandment, and the decree was given in Shushan the palace. And the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed.

- While the collaborators celebrate, the city of Susa is aghast (Cf. 8:15). Apparently such a decree had never before come from the royal court.

— Haman's bloodthirstiness, along with Xerxes' seeming indifference to such atrocities, appeared incredible even to a society that was used to cruel behavior