

ESTHER STUDY 3

Super Sinister

Most of us have heard the horrific stories that are told of how our Lord's precious people, the Jews, endured World War II under the tyranny of the Nazi regime. It is not as commonly known, however, that there was another "Hitler" in history, found right here in the pages of Esther. His name was Haman, like Adolph, his agenda included the complete annihilation of the Jews. In Chapter Three we read of a horrific plan that would have cut short God's glorious plan, but for the provision he made through one young Jewish girl becoming Queen of Persia.

The ghastly degree came from Xerxes' highest noble, Haman the Agagite. It is important to note Haman's ancestry. He is a descendent from King Agag of Amalek (1Sa 15:20). "The Amalekites had attacked Israel after she fled from Egypt; for this reason the Lord would "be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation" (Ex 17:16). Israel was not to forget the Amalekite treachery, but was commanded to "blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven" (Dt 25:19).¹ At one point, God had King Saul pursue the Amalekites in order to kill them all and end their future permanently (perhaps in His foreknowledge of what was going to come from this group of people if left alive). King Saul disobeyed and only killed some of them, not all. If Saul from centuries past would have done as the Lord had commanded him and obeyed by destroying all the Amalekites, he may have kept his crown. More importantly our sinister villain, Haman, would not even exist.

During Esther's reign, her cousin, and adopted father, Mordecai was promoted to work alongside other royal officials at the king's gate where he uncovered a vicious plot to kill Xerxes. He proceeded to tell Esther, who in turn, "reported to the king, giving credit to Mordecai."² Thanks to Mordecai, Xerxes was safe, yet still restless. He wanted to win a war, but lacked the resources, human and financial, to bring his dream of worldwide conquest to fruition. His impulsiveness and ego, along with his double-minded advisors, were his larger problems. So it is no surprise when we find him, blinded by deceitful counsel and bribery, sanctioning a royal decree that is utterly diabolical.

Four years after Mordecai saved the king's life, Haman devised a plan to kill Mordecai and all the Jews throughout the kingdom of Xerxes. Haman was enraged that Mordecai would not bow to him as the other royal officials did at the King's gate (and we thought Xerxes had an ego problem...). There are several reasons scholars believe might have prompted Mordecai not to bow. One common reason was that "Jews bowed to their kings, but when Persians bowed to another, it was the same as paying homage to a divine being."³ This act could have constituted idolatry. Furthermore, according to Beth Moore, "Many scholars lean more heavily toward the persisting generational rivalry as the cause for Mordecai's refusal...Mordecai knew Haman's

Pre-Article Questions:

1. A growing number of people (including many believers in Christ) are convinced of the truthfulness of all sorts of conspiracy theories involving the government, military, news, Hollywood, and even organized religion. Why do you think such theories are increasingly popular?
2. In a crisis situation, how do you typically respond?
a) hysterical b) frozen in fear c) pray d) jump into action e) escape f) react in some other way?
Why do you think you respond this way?

1. Commentary. The Holy Bible, Today's New International Version. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI. 2006. 743.

2. Esther 2:22. The Holy Bible, Today's New International Version. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI. 2006.

3. George, Elizabeth. Becoming a Woman of Beauty and Strength. Harvest House Publishers: Eugene, 2001. 57.

heritage.”⁴ Either way, Mordecai was a man who submitted to his king, but would not put a Persian custom above his love and devotion for God. He also would not bow to someone who was on God’s list of enemies. He stood, literally, for what he believed in, even if it meant putting his own life in jeopardy.

As the chapter closes, Haman continues plotting the extermination of Mordecai and the Jewish people. Although he wasn’t the sovereign, he knew exactly what to say to get the king on his side. He brought Xerxes’ ego into play by mentioning that “a certain people did not obey the King’s commands.”⁵ He also recognized the times and realized the king was in need of finances. Haman offered Xerxes an enormous bribe in exchange for carrying out this plan. To put his financial offer in today’s terms, the value of ten thousand talents of silver ranges from \$12 million to over \$1 billion in modern currency, depending on the effects of exchange and inflation. Haman was on a Satan-inspired mission to destroy God’s chosen people. Thankfully, our God is faithful and always keeps his promises. As the prophet states in Zechariah, chapter two, verses eight and nine: For this is what the Lord Almighty says: “After the Glorious One has sent me against the nations that have plundered you—for whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye— I will surely raise my hand against them so that their slaves will plunder them.”

Esther 3, NIV

1 After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles. 2 All the royal officials at the king’s gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor. 3 Then the royal officials at the king’s gate asked Mordecai, “Why do you disobey the king’s command?” 4 Day after day they spoke to him but he refused to comply. Therefore they told Haman about it to see whether Mordecai’s behavior would be tolerated, for he had told them he was a Jew. 5 When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. 6 Yet having learned who Mordecai’s people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai’s people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes. 7 In the twelfth year of King Xerxes, in the first month, the month of Nisan, the pur (that is, the lot) was cast in the presence of Haman to select a day and month. And the lot fell on the twelfth month, the month of Adar. 8 Then Haman said to King Xerxes, “There is a certain people dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king’s laws; it is not in the king’s best interest to tolerate them. 9 If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will give ten thousand talents of silver to the king’s administrators for the royal treasury.” 10 So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. 11 “Keep the money,” the king said to Haman, “and do with the people as you please.” 12 Then on the thirteenth day of the first month the royal secretaries were summoned. They wrote out in the script of each province and in the language of each people all Haman’s orders to the king’s satraps, the governors of the various provinces and the nobles of the various peoples. These were written in the name of King Xerxes himself and sealed with his own ring. 13 Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king’s provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews—young and old, women and children—on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to

4. Moore, Beth. *Esther: Its’ Tough Being A Woman* . LifeWay Press: Nashville, 2008. 60.

5. *Esther 3:8*. The Holy Bible, Today’s New International Version. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI. 2006.

plunder their goods. 14 A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so they would be ready for that day. 15 The couriers went out, spurred on by the king's command, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You that You are faithful. We thank You that You have a plan even when circumstances surrounding us look bleak. Thank You that You have not and never will forget us nor forsake us. You keep Your promises and You avenge our enemies. Help us to trust You in hard times as Esther did and to gain insight from godly counsel as well as Your word. Fill us with the humility to assert ourselves in our times of need with prayer. Give us favor and help us to walk with integrity, no matter what comes our way. Let us be a people who are willing to take a stand for You and for Your Word as truth even if it means loss. We thank You that You protect us from the enemy and that his plans for us will not prevail. Sovereign God, we offer You our hearts and lives today and always. We love you. Amen.

Scripture Questions:

1. Why did Haman become furious with Mordecai? What reasons do you think Mordecai refused to pay homage to Haman? (verses to consider: Exodus 20:3-6; Deut. 25:17-19; I Samuel 15:32-33; Matthew 4:10)
2. Read Genesis 39:2-10 and compare with Esther 3:3-4. How are these two stories similar?
3. Why do you think Haman felt threatened by Mordecai? What do his actions say about the level of insecurity he holds within?
4. In what ways was the suggested decree to the king full of deceit? (hint: he didn't even tell the king it was the Jews he was speaking of, the Jews were very assimilated into the culture of the time, how else would Esther be mistaken for a Persian? He had no evidence for their disobedience to the king).

Application Questions:

1. Read Daniel 3:8-18. How are Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego similar to Mordecai in their resolve and conviction? How are Haman and Nebuchadnezzar similar in their reactions and emotions? Have you ever taken a stand on something you believed was right that caused the other party to be offended or enraged? How did God get glory in your situation?
2. Haman is filled with rage in this passage. Have you ever known a person who got mad and never got over it? What are they like today?
3. Read the following verses on anger Ephesians 4:26-27, 31, Proverbs 19:11, and Philippians 4:5, how do these scriptures give us perspective on anger?
4. From the time the royal decree went out, the Jews had eleven months before its fulfillment. How do you think they felt, and their Persian neighbors felt? Read Psalm 23:4, on what basis did David withstand mental torment while enduring a ten year long death sentence and how does this scripture impact you?
5. Re-read Esther 3:13 and compare Haman's plot to Satan's plot for humans in John 10:10. How do you see spiritual warfare playing out in Esther Chapter Three? In what ways or areas of your life have you been experiencing spiritual warfare lately and how can our small group help encourage/be there for you in the current battle you are facing?

Prayer Partner Assignment:

This week you will be meeting with a girl from your small group to memorize scripture, re-read the text for this week, and discuss what God is speaking to you through the Chapter. Please use this time to pursue the Lord together and deepen your relationship as sisters.

1. Memory Verse: Zechariah 2:8-9
2. Please re-read Esther Chapter Two