Esther

CHAPTER 3-4

Wednesday, September 6, 2023

Introduction:

- In chapter two, we saw the providence of God in the lives of Mordecai and of Esther.
- Although Esther was taken from her people, and would likely become a slave to Ahasuerus, she would soon be used by God to save the Hebrew race.
- Esther will soon prove what God can do through a willing servant, even in the face of the greatest adversity.
- Once again, you can see God’s hand of providence guiding the entire situation!

Opening comments:

- Now that Esther is an “insider” with King Ahasuerus, she is in a position of influence, and God will use that position to carry out His work.
- The fact that Mordecai is able to “keep an eye” on Esther, is indicative that God is about to do great things through her.

I. Haman Plots to Destroy the Jews – Esther 3

A. Haman Promoted – Esther 3:1 After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, and advanced him and set his throne above all the officials who were with him.

1. Haman was an ungodly man, but ... God’s providence...

2. Haman was a descendant of Agag, King of Amalekites, Israel’s sworn enemy. (Exodus 17:14-16)

B. Mordecai refuses to bow to Haman – Esther 3:2-3 And all the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage. Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, “Why do you transgress the king's command?”

1. Not necessarily a command against bowing to political leaders (Genesis 18:2; Exodus 18:7)
2. We don’t see a specific command from Ahasuerus to bow to Haman, but it is definitely implied.

C. Haman seeks revenge – Esther 3:4-7

4 And when they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai’s words would stand, for he had told them that he was a Jew. 5 And when Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage to him, Haman was filled with fury. 6 But he disdain ed to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus. 7 In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, they cast lots) before Haman day after day; and they cast it month after month till the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar.

1. Once it was pointed out to Haman that Mordecai didn’t bow, he was enraged.

2. Haman’s pride and insecurities were “off the charts”. Apparently, he didn’t consider himself a successful leader unless everyone else did too!

3. In Haman’s anger, he not only sought to destroy Mordecai, but all of His people as well! This exposed Haman for who he really was: A power-hungry hater of the Jews. (The Jews would be attacked for 11 months.)

D. Haman shares his plot with Ahasuerus; he approves the plan – Esther 3:8-11

8 Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, “There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king’s laws, so that it is not to the king’s profit to tolerate them. 9 If it please the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay 10,000 talents of silver into the hands of those who have charge of the king’s business, that they may put it into the king’s treasuries.” 10 So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. 11 And the king said to Haman, “The money is given to you, the people also, to do with them as it seems good to you.”

1. Haman wasn’t completely truthful.
   a. Yes – The Jews were scattered and dispersed.
   b. Yes – The Jews had their own laws.
   c. No – The laws of the Jews didn’t prevent them from being loyal subjects of the king.

2. It is my opinion that Mordecai’s refusal to bow was a matter of personal integrity, rather than the law of God.

3. Haman’s plan: Mass destruction and murder of the Jews.
   a. Haman didn’t tell the King how many of these “certain people” were in his kingdom. Likely, Ahasuerus considered it a relatively small number.
   b. The king promised a bribe (10,000 talents of silver), probably paid from the pillaged property of the Jews. (Haman’s greed was great.). (Likely, Ahasuerus had no idea what the real plan was!)
E. The king's decree is published and distributed – Esther 3:12-15
   1. This was a death sentence for all Jews across the empire.
   2. Ahasuerus and Haman sat down to drink together, celebrating this decree.
      a. Likely, the king thought he had done well.
      b. In reality, he had been deceived and misled by Haman.
   3. The citizens of the empire were obviously perplexed by this decree.
      a. No doubt, many of them were “neighbors” to the Jews and they knew they were not a threat.

II. “For Such a Time as This” – Esther 4

A. Mordecai and the Jews Lament – Esther 4:1-3
   When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and he cried out with a loud and bitter cry. He went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one was allowed to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. And in every province, wherever the king's command and his decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.

   1. Mordecai and the Jewish nation go into a period of mourning for what has been decided.
   2. “Sackcloth and ashes” was a sign of bitter anguish and distress.
   3. Through all of this, Mordecai would not grovel at Haman’s feet.
      a. A matter of personal integrity.
      b. Mordecai understood the laws of Persia: Once decreed – Irreversible! (As in chapter one regarding the banishment of Queen Vashti...)

   QUESTION FOR CONSIDERATION: What is missing from this scenario?
   Neither Mordecai, nor the Jews cried out to Yahweh in prayer!

B. Mordecai’s response to Esther – Esther 4:4-7
   1. “Queen Esther is embarrassed by the conduct of Mordecai, and she sends him a new suit of clothes.” There is an application here. The covering of religion will not remove the fact that man is a guilty sinner before God. Neither will religion alter the fact that the wages of sin is death. Mordecai refuses the new garments.”
   2. Mordecai tells the eunuch everything that he has been told, regarding the death sentence that was declared upon the Jews. He even sent word to Esther the exact amount of the bribe that would be paid for the destruction of the Jews.
C. Mordecai’s requests of Esther – Esther 4:8-14

1. His first request:
   a. Mordecai asked the Eunuch to give a copy of the written decree to Esther and asked her to go to the king and beg on behalf of the Jews.
   b. Esther told Hathach to tell Mordecai that if she goes to the inner court of the king without an invitation she will be put to death. (Esther had not seen the king for an entire month!)

2. His second request:
   a. Mordecai sent word to Esther, “Do not think to yourself that in the king’s palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:13b-14).
      1. Essentially, “Remember, you are a Jew as well. You will die as well as your family.”
      2. He is saying, “It may very well be that God has placed Esther in this position just for this purpose!”

D. Esther calls for a fast – Esther 4:15-17

Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, “Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.” Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

1. Esther decides to make a gutsy move and meet with the king.
2. She asks for the Jews to gather for prayer and fasting first.
   *Remember in Matthew 17, when the disciples came to Jesus with a demon possessed boy whom they could not heal?
   
   Jesus’ reply: “...this kind does not come out except by prayer and fasting.”

Conclusion/Application

- ESTHER’S COMMITMENT: “I will break the law and go to the king. If I perish, I perish.” She was determined to be obedient and protect her people, at all cost.
- JESUS’ EXHORTATION: “...do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28)
- THE APOSTLE PAUL’S EXAMPLE: “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. (Philippians 1:21)

End Notes