

Esther-Chapters 3 and 4-Handout #2

Haman, the enemy of God's people, is introduced in chapter 3. Also the conflict between Haman and Mordecai that propels the hatred of Haman for the Jews and causes him to seek their extermination. This chapter begins some four years(4) after Esther is made queen.

v.1-6 - Haman is promoted by king Ahasuerus (kshayarsha) to a position above all the princes. Everyone was to bow to him according to the king's command. Mordecai refused to bow even when pressed and questioned by the king's servants. This order of reverence was not worship as to a god. Just courtly honor. Mordecai's refusal is probably more to do with pride, and his telling the servants that he is a Jew is really an excuse. We don't have any indication that Mordecai is righteous and pious. He probably is more nationalistic. This, however, causes the wrath of Haman and causes him to want to exterminate all of Mordecai's people, the Jews, in all the kingdom.

v.7-9-In the first month, called Nisan, in the twelfth year of king Ahasuerus, (Esther was made queen almost at the end of his 7th year, verses 2:16, so she had been queen for more than 4 years.) they cast Pur, that is lot (so this is why the feast that will be established is called Purim) to decide when to kill the Jews. By the lot the twelfth month of Adar was indicated. So the Jews had eleven months before their extermination. Haman tells the king there is a certain people that threaten his rule, but doesn't let him know who they are and who is included in the number. He is manipulating the king. He convinces the king to send out a decree declaring the extermination, and he also assured the king that he could bring 10,000 talents of silver into the treasury (no doubt, from the spoil of the Jews extermination).

v.10-15-Ahasuerus gives Haman his ring to use as signet, and with it Haman sends the decree throughout all the provinces of the kingdom of Persia. All Jews, everywhere in Persian kingdom (this would include the Jews who had returned to Palestine) young and old, male and female, were to be killed on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, Adar.

Note: Some have suggested the conflict between Mordecai the Benjamite and Haman the Agagite is a continuation of an ancient feud between Saul the Benjamite and King Agag. Haman would have to be a descendant of Agag for this to be a plausible proposal. But some commentators believe that a high official of the Persian court would be a descendant of a western Semitic group from 600 years before. However, there was a province of the Persian empire called AGAG, and someone coming from there would be an AGAGITE. This seems more likely.

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Page Two

Chapter Four

v.1-3-Mordecai found out about the decree and possibly realized that he had brought this on when he revealed that he was a Jew. He joined all the Jews in all the provinces in mourning with sackcloth and ashes, even before the king's gate.

v.4-7-Esther's maids tell her that Mordecai is before the gate weeping and wailing, in sackcloth and ashes. Esther was grieved because of this and tried to send him a change of clothes, but Mordecai refused them (no one was to enter the king's gate in sackcloth and ashes) Esther is still unaware why he is mourning. She sends Hatach the chamberlain to enquire. Mordecai tells him what has been decreed.

v.8-14-Mordecai sends Esther a copy of the decree and charges her to go to the king and make supplication for her people. Now is the time to reveal that you are a Jew. Esther sends word again through Hatach that she cannot just walk up to the king. No one, not even the queen, can enter the king's inner court who is not called to be there. If one does, it can be put to death according to the law, except the king hold out the golden scepter. Esther lets him know that she had not been called into the king's presence for thirty days. Mordecai sends word back: "don't think you will escape this decree, even if you are in the king's house. If you hold your peace, deliverance will come from another place, but you and your father's house shall be destroyed." And then he says the words much quoted "and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

v.15-17-Esther sends word back to Mordecai- gather all the Jews together in Shushan and fast for me for 3 days and I and my maidens will fast likewise, and then I will go to the king, which is not according to the law: AND IF I PERISH, I PERISH.

Fasting is mentioned but no prayer, no petitioning the Lord. In fact, the Lord is not mentioned. Can we assume that there was some prayer. And did Esther's pagan maidens pray?