

"THE ENEMY OF THE JEWS"

**I. Introduction**

- A. One of the threads that we can trace throughout the Bible is the idea that the church is often under attack.
1. We see it in the early chapters of Genesis, where wicked Cain kills his God-fearing brother Abel.
  2. We see it in the beginning of the book of Exodus, where Pharaoh orders that all Israelite baby boys be drowned in the Nile.
  3. We see it in the book of Psalms, where God's people frequently cry out for deliverance from their oppressors.
  4. We see it at the time of the Babylonian exile, when the temple was destroyed and God's people were carried off into captivity.
  5. We see it in the book of Acts, where the church's leaders are opposed, arrested, and in a few instances even put to death.
  6. And when we look back at the past 2,000 years of church history, we see many examples of the same sort of thing.
  7. Is it any wonder that the book of Revelation symbolically depicts the church as two martyrs?
- B. In the passage that we are studying this evening, we come across yet another attempt by the world to wipe out the church.
1. As we study this text tonight, we will gain insight into what it is that sets the world and the church at odds with each other.
  2. There is a fundamental spiritual principle behind what transpires in this chapter.

3. And it is a principle that continues to be behind everything that takes place in the world today.

## II. The Stand

- A. Chapter 3 of Esther opens by introducing us to a new character, a man named Haman.
  1. It is a bit of a surprise that it is Haman, not Mordecai, who is promoted to the highest position in the empire by King Ahasuerus.
  2. After all, the previous chapter ended by telling us how Mordecai had uncovered a plot against the king's life.
  3. Yet Mordecai's deeds went unrewarded, though they were recorded in the king's annals.
  4. Instead of Mordecai receiving honors for his service to the king, Haman is made the king's prime minister.
- B. The author is clearly making a point by juxtaposing the king's failure to remember Mordecai with his promotion of Haman.
  1. Once again, the king's lack of wisdom is exposed.
  2. He cannot see that Mordecai is a better man than Haman, even though Mordecai has just saved his life.
  3. As far as Haman is concerned, it certainly does not speak well of him that the king had to issue a decree to get people to bow down to him.
  4. He was not the kind of man who commanded respect.
- C. Haman is also identified as an Agagite.
  1. That is, he was a descendent of the Amalekite king Agag.

2. This is an important piece of information.
  3. The Amalekites were under God's curse because they had attacked the Israelites when they first came out of Egypt.
  4. After the Israelites prevailed in battle against them, the book of Exodus says this: "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.' And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The LORD Is My Banner, saying, 'A hand upon the throne of the LORD! The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.'" (Ex. 17:14-16)
  5. About four hundred years later, the Lord sent Samuel to Saul with this message: "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.'" (1 Sam. 15:2-3)
  6. This was a summons to conduct a holy war, a command to carry out God's sentence upon the Amalekites.
  7. Saul went out and defeated the Amalekites, but he did not obey the Lord.
  8. He spared their king, Agag, along with the choicest of the livestock.
  9. As a result, the Lord rejected Saul as Israel's king, saying, "Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king." (1 Sam. 15:23)
- D. This background is extremely important in helping us understand the conflict between Mordecai and Haman here in Esther 3.
1. Not only was Haman a descendant of Agag, but Mordecai was a descendant of Saul.

2. We know this from chapter 2, where the writer said that Mordecai was a descendant of Kish, the father of Saul.
  3. This explains why Mordecai refused to bow down and pay homage to Haman.
  4. Haman was an Amalekite, a member of the people with whom the Lord had sworn he would be at war from generation to generation.
  5. Mordecai's ancestor Saul failed miserably when he went up against the Amalekites, but Mordecai was not going to make the same mistake.
- E. When the other servants asked Mordecai why he would not bow down before Haman, he told them the whole story.
1. He recounted these events from his people's history and thus revealed that he was a Jew.
  2. This stands in sharp contrast to chapter 2, where Mordecai commanded Esther not to reveal her people.
  3. What has happened to Mordecai?
  4. Why is he all of a sudden willing to make his identity as Jew known?
  5. I think it is because he has been roused from a state of spiritual slumber.
  6. Being confronted with the enemy of God's people has shocked him out of his contented life in Susa and reminded him of who he really is.
  7. This man who had previously tried to blend in and look for ways to improve his position has finally come to a point where he sees that he needs to take a stand.

### III. The Plot

- A. When Haman found out about Mordecai's refusal to bow down and pay homage to him, he was enraged.
  - 1. But the writer tells us that Haman "disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone."
  - 2. He realizes that this is not just a personal grudge.
  - 3. It is not just that Haman rubs Mordecai the wrong way.
  - 4. Upon learning that Mordecai is a Jew, Haman sees that this is something with a history -- a long, long history.
  - 5. So he begins to plot out a way to destroy not just Mordecai but all of his people, the entire Jewish race.
  
- B. This is more than just an example of extreme revenge.
  - 1. Haman and Mordecai hate each other because of who they are, because of their ancestry.
  - 2. They hate each other because they belong to two lines of descent that have always been at odds with one another.
  - 3. As I said a moment ago, this is something with a history.
  - 4. In fact, the history goes back long before the days of Saul, and even before the days of Moses.
  - 5. It goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden, to the curse that God pronounced upon the serpent, saying, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."
  - 6. Mordecai and Haman hate each other because God graciously determined to take some of the rebellious human race and bring them back into friendship with himself.

7. And because God's people enjoy friendship with him, we are at enmity with the world.
- C. In order to determine the most opportune time to hatch his plot, Haman cast Pur, or lots.
1. This was a common practice in the Ancient Near East, akin to the horoscopes that people consult nowadays.
  2. When the lots suggested that the time was right, Haman went to the king and unfolded his plan.
  3. Little did he know that the timing and circumstances of all that was about to unfold were in the hands of the Lord.
- D. When Haman went to the king, he characterized the Jews as a threat to the empire, calling attention to the fact that their laws are so strange and that they do not keep the king's laws.
1. Then he promised to pay 10,000 talents of silver into the royal treasury.
  2. This was an extraordinary sum of money, so much so that it is difficult to believe that Haman would have been able to actually follow through with it.
  3. According to one commentator, it amounted to more than half of the Persian empire's annual tax revenue.
  4. The fact that the king didn't even question this is another indication that he was not the brightest guy around.
  5. And aside from the money, Ahasuerus was allowing his prime minister to persuade him to pass a law that not only condemned the man who saved his life, but that also condemned his wife, Queen Esther.

#### **IV. The Death Warrant**

- A. Haman's plan was utterly diabolical.
1. He persuaded the king to issue an edit that was a death warrant to all the Jews in the empire, an empire that stretched from India to Africa.
  2. It brings to mind such modern-day atrocities as Hitler's Final Solution for the Jews, the mass slaughter of ethnic Tutsis by ethnic Hutus in Rwanda, or the 56 million babies who have been killed in our own nation since the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision in 1973.
  3. But as I said earlier, there is more to Haman's actions than just ethnic hatred.
  4. At the heart of this conflict is a fundamental spiritual enmity.
  5. Haman's plot is another instance of Satan's ongoing attempt to destroy the church.
- B. We are given a vivid depiction of this spiritual conflict in Revelation 12, where the church is represented as a pregnant woman and Satan as a terrifying dragon bent on devouring her child.
1. John says: "And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days." (Rev. 12:1-6)

2. This is the same conflict that God foretold when he said that there would be enmity between the offspring of the woman and the offspring of the serpent.
  3. The church has a terrifying enemy, an enemy who wants to wipe her off the face of the earth.
- C. Don't be surprised if the world hates you because you are a Christian.
1. Of course, you should not try to make the world hate you.
  2. As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.
  3. But if there are times when your loyalty to Christ and his kingdom causes the unbelieving world to despise you, do not be dismayed.
  4. Instead, take it as a reminder of God's grace.
  5. The world hated Christ, and it will also hate those who belong to Christ.
  6. By God's grace you belong to Christ rather than to the world.
  7. Though in your fallen estate you belong to the world, God has placed enmity between you and the ruler of this world.
  8. He has delivered you from the domain of darkness and brought you into the kingdom of the Son he loves.
  9. And just like the woman in Revelation 12, he will spiritually protect you while you are in the wilderness of this world.
- D. Near the end of our passage in Esther, we are given a foreshadowing of the deliverance that is about to come.

1. The date on which the king sent out his edict was the day before the slaughter of the Passover lamb.
2. This detail points back to how God rescued his people from the destroyer when they were in Egypt, and it clues us in to the fact that he is about to do the same thing again.
3. This is something that God will keep on doing, again and again, for as long as this age shall last.
4. In the words of the psalmist, "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me." (Ps. 138:7)