

Haman Plots Against the Jews

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Haman plots to eradicate the Jews because Mordecai will not bow down to him
2. aim – to cause us to remember that opposition and persecution always follow the people of God
3. passage – Esther 2:19-3:15

b. outline

1. The Plot Against the King (Esther 2:19-23)
2. The Refusal of Mordecai (Esther 3:1-6)
3. The Edict Against the Jews (Esther 3:7-15)

c. opening

2. the **direction** of our exposition of the book
 - a. **chapters 1-2** lay out *in detail* how it is that Esther (a Jewess) was able to rise to Queen of Persia
 - b. **chapter 3** is the “center” of the book – the plot by Haman to destroy the Jews
 1. the elevation of Esther is *in anticipation* of this particular threat
 2. the remaining chapters outline *how* this threat is thwarted, specifically through Esther
 - c. however, a brief **parenthesis** is included in **2:19-23**
 1. it outlines how it is that Mordecai is able to *thwart* the threat of Haman
 2. **irony**: it is Mordecai’s actions after this event that *precipitate* the threat of Haman

I. The Plot Against the King (Esther 2:19-23)

Content

a. the timing of the plot

1. the writer times the event to when the “*virgins were gathered together a second time*”
 - a. the exact meaning of the phrase “*second time*” is unknown
 - b. but, it does seem to refer to a *second* gathering of the “queen” harem (**note v. 2; “virgins”**)
 - c. (possibly) this is some sort of celebratory gathering for Esther now established as queen
 - d. **IOW**: something *big* is happening at the palace, and the plot that is revealed is related (**somehow**)
2. the writer notes (**twice!**) that Mordecai is “*sitting at the king’s gate*”
 - a. it was customary in ancient times for the gate of the city (or palace) to be a place of justice
 - b. **i.e.** where officials of the king would sit to administer justice and settle disputes (**e.g.** Lot: **Genesis 19**; Absalom: **2 Samuel 15**; Boaz: **Ruth 4**)
 - c. it is likely that Mordecai has the opportunity to perform this task because Esther is now queen
 1. Esther “*obeying*” Mordecai (**v. 20**) suggests that he sought this through her royal prerogatives
 2. (**again**) Mordecai has pursued Esther *to* her royal position out of **self-advancing** motives

b. the substance of the plot

1. the developers of this plot are “*Bigthan and Teresh*” two of the king’s eunuchs
 - a. these two men were eunuchs, men “physically altered” to serve the women of the king
 - b. these two men served at the “*threshold*” of the king – his **private quarters**
 1. they had access to the most intimate locations and activities of the king himself
 - c. these two men hatch a plot to “*lay hands*” on the king – obviously, an assassination plot
 1. maybe they were “*angry*” with the king’s choice of Esther, or maybe they had been “shut out” in some way from the decision-making process
 2. whatever their reasoning, the grievance was strong enough to assassinate the emperor
2. the substance of the plot came to the knowledge of Mordecai
 - a. it is not said *how*, but we can assume (by implication) that the information got to him by the **providence of God** – **i.e.** men planning assassinations do not make that generally known!

c. the thwarting of the plot

1. Mordecai relays the substance to Esther, Esther tells the king, the king investigates the matter, and the two plotters are hanged – **note**: the event is quickly *passed over* to make a point ...
2. **key point**: the event was “*recorded in the book of the chronicles*” – the details were “put on record”
 - a. this last sentence establishes the *point* of this story = the recording of the event in the king’s chronicle will be key to how the plot of Haman is overturned in **chap. 6**

II. The Refusal of Mordecai (Esther 3:1-6)

Content

a. an introduction to Haman (vv. 1-2)

1. the **antagonist** of the story – the “bad guy” as he would be known in typical storytelling
2. little of his background is reported by the author
 - a. he is an Agagite – (possibly) a descendant of Agag, the former king of the Amalekites
 1. King Saul was supposed to eradicate them, but his refusal cost him his throne (**1 Sam. 15**)
 2. an ancient blood-feud still existed between the Jews and the Amalekites
 3. which probably explains why he decides to commit **genocide** against the Jews (**see below**)
 - b. he is (probably) an exiled person himself – just as the Jews scattered throughout Persia
 1. given his status as a *non-Persian*, it is likely that he (also) is an exile from a previous conquest
 2. which helps explain his reaction to Mordecai – **a man desperate for honor in a foreign land**
 - c. he is “*advanced*” by the king – somehow, this Agagite manages to work his way into a high position
 1. he appears to become a *chief confidant* of the king; nearly to the role of “prime minister”
 2. the king orders all of the other officials and servants to pay “*homage*” to him
 - a. **i.e.** to give deference to him as though he represents the position *of the king himself*
 3. which explains his absolute anger at Mordecai’s response to him

b. the refusal of Mordecai (vv. 3-4)

1. Mordecai refuses to “*bow down or pay homage*” to Haman (homage = bow in worship; prostrate)
 - a. because he does not want to pay homage to an Agagite, a people under God’s judgment
 - b. because he does not agree that Haman deserves to be in this position
 - c. because he knows the true nature of the man (as self-centered) and refuses to aid the ruse
 - d. because he is confident in his own position, particularly as the cousin of the queen
 - e. because he knows that it is only a matter of time before the king remembers his revelation (**above**)
 - f. because he knows that to pay homage to Haman is to give to Haman what only *God* deserves
 - g. **principle: Christians are to give homage only to God, for he alone is worthy of worship**
 1. even if that means (a) suffering loss in this life or (b) abandoning things that are idols

c. the anger of Haman (vv. 5-6)

1. Haman’s response turns from just anger against Mordecai to anger against Mordecai’s people

III. The Edict Against the Jews (Esther 3:7-15)

Content

a. the plot by Haman (v. 7)

1. the plot by Haman begins in the twelfth year of the reign of Xerxes I (c. 474BC – 5 years after Esther)
2. Haman works out the details of his plot for almost a full year (from the 1st month to the 12th)
 - a. the casting of “*Pur*” (the Persian word for “*lots*”) was the means by which Haman (superstitiously) picked the exact timing of his genocidal attack – a **specific day** on which to launch his attack

b. the request by Haman (vv. 8-9)

1. once Haman has his entire plan in place, he then approaches the king for permission:
 - a. he contends that the Jews are scattered everywhere (implying that they are uncontrollable)
 - b. he contends that the Jews do not keep the laws of the king, but defer to their own laws
 - c. he contends that the Jews are not “*profitable*” to the king (implying that they bring no value to him)
 - d. he offers to pay the king 10,000 talents of silver (12m ounces) as a bribe to allow this to go forward

c. the edict from Haman (vv. 10-15)

1. the king authorizes the plan, and even allows Haman to use the silver for the project itself (**see v. 11**)
2. so, Haman issues an edict (using the signet ring of the king)
 - a. the edict is to kill every Jew throughout the empire on a single day,
 - b. the edict is issued in the first month of the next year (13th year of Xerxes; **v. 12**), to be executed on the 13th day of the 12th month, about 1 year hence
 - c. the size of the empire would require that much time for the edict to be circulated and the necessary preparations made in every province – the time would also allow for God to intervene
3. **question:** why would Xerxes agree to a genocide within his own empire? or Haman propose it?
 - a. because he was a “**man of his times**” – a cold-blooded, ruthless ruler who felt free to destroy anything *or anyone* that stood in his way to control as much power as possible (**i.e.** the Greeks)

- b. because he was a “**man of his nature**” – a rebellious human being who, by virtue of his hatred of his own Creator, saw in the Jews that which threatened his “comfort” to be deprived
1. **principle: those who find favor with God represent a great threat to the depraved heart**
 2. **e.g.** the anti-Semitism/Christianity common in the world has no explanation other than the fact that the elect represent an **existential threat** to personal autonomy in the lusts of the flesh
 - a. **IOW:** when sinners look upon a “favored” people, they inherently know that their own sinfulness stands in judgment under the One who favors those people
 - b. thus, the elect “prick” the conscience, and will be persecuted by those who desire to sin
 3. **truth: contrary to our very recent experience, genuine followers of Christ, who bow down only to him, will suffer persecution at the hands of lawless men, but that persecution is ordained by God as a means through which he brings us to himself in holiness**

“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles ... Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake ... A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master ...” (Matt. 10:16-25)
 4. **Lord’s Supper:** in the elements, we are reminded of the cost that Jesus paid on our behalf, but we are also reminded of the cost we must pay (in this world) to follow after him