

Haman the Agagite

Esther 3

The Bible commands us to love our enemies. It goes against God's law to harbor bitterness towards someone because of a personal wrong committed against us. It is also wrong to treat someone with disdain simply because they happen to belong to a particular family of whom we have had past conflict.

This being said, it is important for us to understand that every true believer is wrapped up in a winner take all, life and death struggle against cosmic forces of evil.

Theme of Esther: God is providentially working to save, or preserve, his people for himself.

God would not have to be providentially working in this way unless an enemy existed who was actively seeking to destroy God's people. But my experience is that most of us do not live our lives being conscious of this reality.

ESV 1 Peter 5:8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

It is true that we have a spiritual foe that is actively seeking to consume us. But this spiritual foe also makes use of human instruments. This brings me to a question that I want you to ponder as we look at Esther, chapter 3: Do you believe that evil exists in the world?

I am guessing that most of you do. But where does it exist? And why does it exist?

Esther chapter 3 is the story of one man awakening to the truth that evil exists, and that this evil is centered in one man who will seek the utter destruction of God's people.

I hope that you will learn from this chapter the cosmic struggle that we are wrapped up in. I hope that you will find courage to take your stand against evil.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. Let's consider the text before us.

Read Esther 3:1-7.

ESV 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.
 2 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.
 3 Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to
 Mordecai,
 "Why do you transgress the king's command?"
 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 disdained 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.

Timing = 12th year (v. 7) - 5 years have passed between chapters 2 and 3.
 Sometimes it is easy to think that these events occurred over a short period of
 time.

We miss the fact that Mordecai and Esther have been living a relatively
 peaceful existence in the midst of a pagan people.

Mordecai is an official working for the Persian government and Esther finds
 herself in the position of being queen to King Ahasuerus.

Last week I made the point that both Esther and Mordecai were not just in the
 world, but to a degree were of the world. No religiously conscious Jewish

mother would be excited that her daughter was in the harem of the Persian king.

Mordecai had himself advanced in the Persian government, but he had done so hiding his identity as a Jew. It is not as if either of them consciously denied their faith. But how far had they drifted from God's purpose for their lives: Do you remember why God redeemed his people out of Egypt?

Exodus 5:1 Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness.'"

How far removed were Mordecai and Esther from the true worship of God? Their daily existence brought them closer to pagan life than to holy living among God's people.

If you do not feel at some level what life was like for Esther and Mordecai, you will miss the stark change that begins to take place in chapter 3.

I doubt very much that either Esther or Mordecai saw the Persians as utterly distinct from themselves. The lines between themselves as God's people and the Persians as pagans were very blurred to say the least.

But, in God's perfect providence, this is all about to change.

Chapter 3 introduces us to a new character: Haman.

What are we told about Haman?

- He is an Agagite:
- He is the son of Hammedatha = we know nothing about Hammedatha.

Haman was promoted by Ahasuerus

- set his throne above all the officials who were with him.
 - o Second in the land.
- All the king's servants ... bowed down and paid homage to Haman
 - o at the king's command
- An ironic twist: Mordecai saves the king's life and is forgotten. Haman is promoted, yet no good reason for his promotion is given.
 - o Mordecai's not being rewarded is a sort of injustice that he experienced. He was passed by while another was promoted.

With Haman's promotion, the plot thickens. Mordecai refuses to bow down or pay homage to Haman. Why does Mordecai refuse?

- We are not explicitly told. Opinions vary.

- Possibilities:
 - He was religiously motivated - Mordecai does not want to break the first commandment.
 - But Mordecai did not have a problem with bowing down or paying homage to King Ahasuerus.
 - It was not a religious act to bow in the Persian court.
 - Gen. 33:3 - Jacob with Esau
 - This is not the same situation as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.
 - This is more of a case of giving personal respect to Haman.
 - It is important to realize that for Mordecai to be in the position that he is in, he would have certainly given such respect and homage to King Ahaseurus.
 - He is jealous due to Haman's promotion.
 - Mordecai has reason to be jealous since he was overlooked for promotion while Haman was promoted without any good reason.
 - But if personal jealousy was Mordecai's motivation, then it was not clear to Mordecai's colleagues. They repeatedly ask Mordecai what motivates him. If it were an obvious case of jealousy, would they not have seen this?
 - And nothing in the text itself speaks of Mordecai's jealousy.
 - The Best Explanation: Mordecai was motivated by the fact that Haman was an Agagite.
 - Mordecai is introduced to us as a Jew, but more specifically: a Benjamite.
 - Haman is introduced to us an Agagaite.
 - To most of us the name Agagite has little or no meaning. It is just another name that we do not know how to pronounce.
 - But not so with Mordecai.
 - Agag was the king of the Amalekites.
 - Read Exodus 17:8-16. (Israel has come up out of Egypt and they are on their way to the Promised Land.)
 - Israel has just been redeemed as a People out of Egypt. The Amalekites have the dubious distinction of being the first people to aggressively attack God's People/God's Son.

- “I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.”
- “The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.”
- God takes very personal any attacks against his people.
- Read Deut. 25:17-19.
 - “... you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget.”
 - There is an irreconcilable war between the Amalekites and God’s people.
 - This is written down in the Law of God.
- I Samuel 15 (some 400 years later)
 - Saul is anointed at King over Israel.
 - Guess what one of the first commands that God has for his king?
 - Wipe out the Amalekites! All of them!
 - “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, sheep, camel and donkey.”
 - This sounds harsh to our ears, but the truth is that all who seek the destruction of God’s people will be judged by Christ.

ESV **Acts 9:4** And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

Either God will bring his enemies over to his side, in mercy, like with Paul, or they will be crushed by his wrath for their sinful hatred of God’s people.

- Saul defeats the Amalekites... but Saul spares Agag, king of the Amalekites.
- God departs from Saul from this point forward. But even more important, Agag lives on.
- 5 Times in the book of Esther we are told that Haman is an Agagite.
 - 2 times in chapter 3.

- And Mordecai is a Benjamite.
- There is bad blood between Benjamites and Agagites.
- The Hatfields and the McCoys.
- From Mordecai's perspective Haman is a Nazi!
- LXX = "bully"
- 9:24 = "Macedonian"
- The struggle between Mordecai and Haman is best understood as a microcosm of the larger struggle between Israel and the Amalekites.
- And even on a grander scale, the struggle between the People of God and the People of Satan.
- When you consider all that Mordecai was willing to compromise, it is rather shocking that he makes such a strong stand here.

I do not know all that is going on in the heart of Mordecai, but it seems to me that this animosity towards the Amalekites was more personal than religious. But in the providence of God, it will be the spark that awakens Mordecai to his own identity and draws the line between God's people and those who oppose God's people.

Haman's fury

- But he disdained to lay hands of Mordecai alone
- They had made known to Haman the people of Mordecai
- Haman sought to destroy all Jews throughout the entire kingdom!

Have you ever wondered why Haman's fury turns into an all-out rampage to destroy every last Jew across the entire kingdom?

Does that not seem a little extreme - even for an unbeliever?

It only makes sense as we see that Haman himself is influenced by even greater forces.

Revelation 12 gives us a picture of Satan as a dragon who is seeking to devour the woman from whom the Messiah would come.

Haman's own hatred is fanned into flame by Satan himself.

What appears to be on the surface only a personal struggle for revenge, is really only one expression of a larger cosmic struggle between God and Satan over the people of God.

Satan and those who belong to him are raging against the rule of God.

But God is not impressed. He is fully in control, even if it is in ways that are somewhat hidden.

Look again at verse 7.

V. 7 - They cast Pur (lots) - A common practice throughout the ANE

- Psalm 16:5-6 - “lot” same word.
 - Joshua cast lots to determine who received what portion of land for their inheritance.
 - David understands that his “lot” was not simply a crapshoot, but that God controlled his destiny.
 - Proverbs 16:33 - “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.”
- before Haman
- day after day
- for twelve months
- Why?
 - To determine the date for when the Jews should be destroyed.
 - Providentially, the date for extermination falls far enough away for there to be time for God to work to redeem his people.
 - Could God have worked in other ways? Of course. But the rolling of the dice is recorded for us to see that God is the one who controls even the roll of the dice.

We often speak of “luck”.

God knows no such thing.

Even the outcome of the roll of the dice is in his control.

Read 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."

Haman's plot:

- A certain people scattered throughout your kingdom. (dispersed - 1 Peter)
- Their laws are different from every other people.
- They do not keep the king's laws, so that it is not to the king's profit to tolerate them.
- Let it be decreed that they be destroyed.
 - o This great and powerful king is again being told what to do.
 - o He is being bribed as well. (10,000 talents of silver)
 - More than half of the entire revenue of the empire (14,560 talents - Herodotus)

The king agrees - gives his signet ring. (authority to destroy the Jews)

- This all shows us that the King did not really care.

Notice: We are again told who Haman is:

- The Agagite
- son of Hammedatha
- **The enemy of the Jews**

Everything is changed. We go from not really knowing what is the purpose of Mordecai and Esther to now understanding that they are in the midst of a struggle to completely annihilate God's people.

The reality is this: Satan is continually seeking to destroy God's people.

- Even if we live in relatively peaceful times, which is a good thing to be thankful for, we must always keep before our eyes that satan is seeking to devour whomever he can.
- We must always remain diligent.
 - o Eph 6:10-20

Read Esther 3:12-15.

- 12 Then the king's scribes were summoned
on the thirteenth day of the first month,
and an edict,
according to all that Haman commanded,
was written to the king's satraps
and to the governors over all the provinces
and to the officials of all the peoples,
to every province in its own script and every people in
its own language.
It was written in the name of King Ahasuerus
and sealed with the king's signet ring.
- 13 Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces
with instruction to destroy,
to kill,
and to annihilate all Jews,
young and old,
women and children,
in one day,
the thirteenth day of the twelfth month,
which is the month of Adar,
and to plunder their goods.
- 14 A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province by
proclamation
to all the peoples to be ready for that day.
- 15 The couriers went out hurriedly by order of the king,
and the decree was issued in Susa the citadel.
And the king and Haman sat down to drink,
but the city of Susa was thrown into confusion.

The official decree:

- destroy
- kill
- annihilate all Jews
 - o Young and old
 - o Women and children
- and to plunder their goods

The Edict is sent out on the 13th Day of the 1st Month. (The Eve of Passover)

- The Day slotted for the massacre was to occur 11 months later.
- The 13th day of the 12th month - The month of Adar

And the king and Haman sat down to drink

But the city of Susa was thrown into confusion.

- not everyone liked the decree.
- it was a logistical nightmare

God has reason to destroy us!

- Christ!

ESV Colossians 1:13-23 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities- all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. ²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

“...There is a force at work in the world bent on destroying God’s people and thwarting God’s promises.” Jobes

Revelation 13:7 ⁷ Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation,

God is absolutely in control of all that occurs in this cosmic struggle:

Acts 4:26-28 ²⁶ The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed'- ²⁷ for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

You are wrapped up in this struggle.

- You can choose to ignore it - for a time.

- But the lines must be drawn.
- Jesus says, you are either with him or against him.
- You cannot be both...
-