

# Esther: The Plot to Destroy the Jews (Ch. 3)

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March 2010

## Verses 1-6

Haman (“magnificent”) was promoted as the king's right-hand man, perhaps for some great thing he did for the king (cf. Gen. 41:39-42; Dan. 6:3), though no such thing is stated. He is the son of Hammedatha, an Agagite. Perhaps this ancestry points back to Agag, king of the Amalekites, however, this seems unlikely as these people were completely destroyed by the Israelites in Saul's day (1 Sam. 15; cf. Ex. 17:14-16).

Like many high-ranking officials, Haman demanded honor and respect rather than earning it, even taking this desire to the point of making a law to actually worship him. Though God is not mentioned in the book, we see clearly that Mordecai's allegiance was to Him alone (Ex. 20:3), and so refused to obey this particular law. While we should respect our leaders (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:17), worship is reserved for God (Matt. 4:10; cf. Matt. 14:33; Acts 10:25-26; Heb. 1:6). And while we ought to obey the laws of the land (Rom. 13:1; Tit. 3:1), any law that causes us to disobey God ought to be rejected (Acts 4:19; 5:29). Mordecai, like others in the Bible, understood this truth (cf. Dan. 3; 6), though they were among the few.

The other officials tried to get Mordecai to conform, but he stood his ground (cf. Rom. 12:2). These men went to Haman to see if being a Jew (lit. man of Judah, used more in this book than any other in the Old Testament) was good reason to refuse homage to Haman. Of course this wasn't a good reason for Haman, who was filled with wrath. As if the initial establishment of this law didn't say enough, this and his subsequent actions paint a picture of a very proud, haughty, hateful, and insecure person.

Haman is so angry that it wasn't enough for him to punish Mordecai for disobeying his law, but all the Jews across the empire (though permitted to return, many did not return to Jerusalem; cf. Ezra 2:64-65; 49,697 in first return).

## Verses 7-11

We see here that we've now come 9 years since the feasts of Ahasuerus (1:3) and a little over 4 years since his marriage to Esther (2:16). In the first month (Nisan; March – April), the king's servants who were loyal to Haman cast the Pur (lot) to determine an appropriate time for Haman to carry out his plan to destroy the Jews. Casting lots can be likened to rolling dice, or perhaps drawing straws. This was a common practice in ancient times associated with divination (Jon. 1:7; Acts 1:24-26), and also to make fair decisions (Lev. 16:18; Pr. 18:18) or distributions (Jos. 18-19; Matt. 27:35). The lot falls on the twelfth month (Adar; February – March), on the thirteenth day (3:13). One has to wonder why Haman didn't just choose tomorrow or next week. Perhaps this is God's providence at work (cf. Pr. 16:33).

It seems somewhat deceptive that only after Haman maps out his plans does he come to the king with his request, and that he mentions a people that are different (and therefore are not fit to live) but does not reveal their identity. Perhaps Haman (and likewise the king) was aware of the decrees of Cyrus (Ezra 1) and Darius (Ezra 6), and was trying to slip this one past the king. Mentioning that these people “do not keep the king's laws” certainly would have gotten the king's attention (cf. Dan. 3, 6), though Haman only witnessed this one instance of Mordecai refusing to pay homage to him. Like many opponents of Christianity today, Haman is determined to attack what he doesn't understand (cf. Jude 10), even with violence.

Haman offers to pay ten thousand talents of silver for this decree to be written, a huge sum of money (depending on the weight of a talent, 300-500 tons of silver, which would be millions or perhaps billions of

dollars today). Some scoff at the idea that Haman would be this wealthy, yet we see other Biblical characters with similar resources (cf. 1 Chr. 29:7). Perhaps he was suggesting that this money is what would be plundered from the Jews (3:13; which might be why the king then says that the “money is yours”). Without inquiring further of his plans, the king gives Haman his signet ring, which was used to seal official documents (Gen. 41:42; cf. Dan. 6:17), and says “do with them as seems good to you.” It's hard to imagine just what Haman did to earn such trust from the king.

I cannot help but see a parallel here with Haman and Hitler. Both men committed themselves to the destruction of the Jewish people, and in doing so, were doing “what seemed good” to them. That being the case, what atheist or agnostic can claim that their actions were wrong? What they were doing was not only good for them, but in their eyes, good for the whole world. Were they not then acting “morally”? Only by an appeal to a moral standard issued by one who is absolutely moral can we claim these actions to be immoral, and thereby demonstrate that for everyone to “do right in his own eyes” is not only a contradictory concept (something cannot be both right and wrong at the same time), but simply cannot work (cf. Judges 21:25; Jer. 10:23; Pr. 14:12; 16:25).

### **Verses 12-15**

One has to wonder if the king even read this decree sent out in his name (3:15). The efficient couriers, which we have discussed earlier (1:22), spread the message quickly throughout the entire empire (3:15). This decree was no doubt welcomed by the enemies of the Jews, but what about their allies? Would they have obeyed this law?

While the king and Haman sat down to drink, the city of Shushan was very confused about this seemingly random and brutal decree, as all should have been.

Though Haman's command is brutally harsh and unjust, critics would point out the fact that the Old Testament contains examples of God's people committing similar acts of violence at His command (Jos. 6:20-21; 10:40; 1 Sam. 15:2-3; many more). Some things to consider along these lines are:

- 1) God is just and always does right (Gen. 18:25; Deut. 32:4)
- 2) God hates violence of the wicked (Ps. 11:5), and hands that shed innocent blood (Pr. 6:16-19)
- 3) God used violence as a means of punishing the wicked (Lev. 18:1-30; 1 Sam. 15:1-6; cf. Gen. 15:12-16), even His own people (Ex. 21:12ff.; Lev. 18:26-30; Deut. 28:15-68)
- 4) Wicked nations knew the consequences of their actions (Ex. 17:14-17; Jos. 9:9-11, 24; cf. Dan. 5; Obad., Jonah, Nahum)
- 5) God gave these commands directly through easily identifiable prophets (Deut. 18:21-22).
- 6) Haman's decree to annihilate the Jews was 1) not commanded by God, and 2) was upon innocent people.