Esther
In the Providence of God
Lesson 3

Day One: Surveying the Chapter

With two of God’s people strategically placed in influential positions within the palace walls, life for the Jewish people appeared to be peaceful and secure. The heroine of the story—Esther—sat on the throne as queen; while the hero—Mordecai—had just rescued the king from death and was sure to be rewarded for such a heroic deed. Enter the villain—Haman—who in chapter three is raised to a position of power and influence, above all the princes who were with the king. If this story was a fictional one being played out on a stage, we would expect to see Haman enter the scene wearing a long black cape and hat, sneaking across the stage to the hisses and boos of the audience. In fact, the story is true and whenever the book of Esther is read aloud today during the Feast of Purim, as the name of Haman is mentioned the audience responds appropriately with boos and hisses, shouting, “May his name be blotted out!”

The historical basis for the drama being played out between Mordecai (a Benjamite descended from King Saul) and Haman (an Agagite) goes back nearly a thousand years from the time the Jewish people left Egypt and were attacked by the Amalekites. God declared war on the Amalekites and first gave the order to Israel’s King Saul to destroy them (1 Samuel 15), but he failed and the crown was removed from him. Because Saul did not fully obey God’s command, some of the Amalekites remained alive and one of their descendants—Haman—became determined to annihilate his forefather’s enemy, the Jews.

1. Moses reminded the Jews of the declaration of war against the Amalekites before they entered the Promised Land. According to Deuteronomy 25:17-18, why did God declare war on Amalek and his descendants forever?

   • What promise did God give to His people in Deuteronomy 25:19?
   
   • The actual account of the battle is found in Exodus 17:8-16. Briefly explain what took place and what God pronounced on the Amalekites?

With this animosity still smoldering in their souls, the stage now becomes set for the showdown between Mordecai and Haman.
The Old Testament often speaks about God’s people dealing with their enemies, usually those of foreign nations who worshipped false gods. In the New Testament Jesus spoke of a new commandment, “I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

2. The word enemy can be simply defined as a foe, adversary, or opponent. Can you think of someone in your life that fits this description? (Please be discreet when sharing names aloud.)

3. Using the elements found in Matthew 5:44, think about what Jesus would have you do with each of the following . . .
   - In what way can you presently bless this individual?
   - Is there something good you can do for them to visibly show the Lord’s love?
   - Write out a sentence prayer for them.

Memory verse: “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”
2 Timothy 3:12

Day Two: Exploring the Text Haman is Promoted

Read Esther 3:1-4

1. What command did the king give concerning Haman? v. 1
   a. How did all the people respond to the command? v. 2
   b. How did Mordecai respond? What statement was he making by refusing to honor Haman?

3. How many times did the king’s servants challenge Mordecai and how did he respond to them? vv. 3-4
   a. When he would not listen to them, who did they go to see? Why?
b. What important piece of information did they share with Haman?

c. Why do you think Mordecai chose to reveal this information at this time?

The king’s servants didn’t appreciate that Mordecai dared to be different. They pressured him daily to conform, but he refused to honor a dishonorable man. Instead, his refusal to bow to Haman reflected his determination to honor God above all.

4. What promise is there for the one who honors God with their life? Psalm 4:3

- Are you making good use of this promise today? How?

As our chapter opened, we were waiting to see Mordecai honored for saving the king’s life. Instead we see an evil man being honored. It’s always disappointing to see wrong win out over right and evil over good, but we must remember that the story isn’t over yet—God is still on the throne and in control! He promises His help for those who fear Him and rewards for those who obey Him.

5. What does it mean to fear the Lord?
   Proverbs 8:13
   Proverbs 9:10
   Proverbs 14:27
   Psalm 19:9

6. What are some of the rewards for those who fear God?
   Psalm 25:14
   Psalm 34:7
   Psalm 145:19

Psalm 147:11 states: “The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His mercy.” If that describes you, then know that you are bringing Him pleasure today! Lift your hands to Him in prayer and bless His name.

Review this week’s memory verse.
Day Three: Exploring the Text  

Death and Destruction Devised

Read Esther 3:5-11

Once Mordecai revealed he was a Jew, his life and the lives of his fellow Jews were put in mortal danger. Haman’s anger toward Mordecai will now be the basis for what follows next.

1. How is Haman’s anger described in verse 5?

The word *wrath* speaks of a violent anger that is given to rage for the purpose of bringing vengeance on another. This is anger that has gone unchecked to the point that it becomes settled in the mind. If not dealt with, it will eventually result in the complete destruction of its object.

2. Haman did not immediately act against Mordecai; instead, what did he plan to do?
   v. 6
   a. How did he determine the time to carry out his plan?  v. 7
   b. How much time was there between casting the lot and implementing the plan?  v. 7  Why would this be advantageous to the Jewish people?

3. How did Haman convince the king that his plan was a good one?  v. 8
   a. How did he sweeten the deal for the king?  v. 9
   b. What was King Ahasuerus’ response?  v.10-11

Haman’s rise to power gave him the opportunity to use his position to bring about death and destruction. But God’s hand of providence is visible even in the casting of lots (the casting of Pur would eventually become the basis for the name of the Feast of Purim). This extra time allotted would give the News time to prepare and Mordecai and Esther to come up with a plan of their own.

*Selah* . . . Aren’t you thankful to know that your fate is not in the hands of another human being, that you belong to God and your times are in His hands? Take a moment to thank Him today for this truth.

*Review this week’s memory verse.*
Day Four: Exploring the Text  The Death Warrant

Read Esther 3:12-15

Haman’s assessment of the Jews in verse 8 was partially correct in that they are *different from all other people*, but his other statement about not keeping the king’s laws was untrue and meant to incur the king’s wrath toward them. Mordecai had proven himself a loyal subject to the king by reporting the conspiracy against him. But the king took his signet ring and handed it to Haman with the instructions: “*do with them as seems good to you*” (verse 11). What seemed good to Haman was their total annihilation.

1. How far did Haman’s evil decree extend? v. 12

   a. Who dictated the terms of the decree?

   b. What evidence would make the people recognize the order came from the king?

No official document was considered valid without the seal of the king’s ring, which was the equivalent of a personal signature.

2. In your own words, describe the fate awaiting the Jews. v.13

   a. What motive did Haman add for the Persian people to turn against their neighboring Jews?

A copy of the written death warrant was to be issued as law in every province, to all the people to prepare them for that coming day.

3. As the couriers went out, what did the king and Haman do? vv. 14-15

   a. What was the response of the people in the city? Why do you think they were perplexed?
The Jewish people have always been the object of ridicule and hatred throughout the centuries; their destruction has been attempted and then circumvented by God on numerous occasions. The persecution they have endured as God’s chosen people has also been true of Christians, and for similar reasons. God’s people have always been engaged in an ongoing spiritual conflict with the god of this world, Satan. Since the promised Messiah was to come through the Jewish race, Satan targeted them for extinction. Unsuccessful in his attempts, his continued goal is to accomplish the same wickedness against God’s people today.

Like the Jews, Christians are distinct in their beliefs—set apart from the world to serve God. It is not that we try to become different, rather we are different because the Holy Spirit who lives in us is committed to making us like our Lord Jesus Christ.

   a. Why does the world hate the Christian? vv. 18-19
   b. Why do believers encounter persecution? v. 20
   c. How are those of the world able to treat God’s people so wickedly? v. 21

Jesus states in this passage that the Helper—Holy Spirit—coming into the life of the believer equips him/her to give witness to the reality of the Son of God, and it is He that will enable the Christian to endure and not stumble.

5. Are you currently facing a situation involving persecution? Are you fearful of the potential outcome to yourself or someone close to you? Please share your thoughts.

If you’re facing a difficult situation right now, be encouraged by the words of Jesus: “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). The world will bring you tribulations—meaning in other words: trials, distress and frustration. But because of Him, you can be of good cheer—take courage, be confident, certain, undaunted! Why? Jesus says, I have overcome the world—I have deprived it of power to harm you and have conquered it for you (Amplified version). Cause for praise, don’t you think?

Review this week’s memory verse.
Day Five: Praying God’s Purpose

Take a moment to ponder each request before writing out your prayer. Lift these requests at home in your quiet time with the Lord. (If you are participating in a group study, you will also have the opportunity to pray for these requests in agreement with others.)

A prayer on behalf of your enemy . . .
At the end of Day One (Pg. 2) of your lesson, you were asked to prayerfully consider someone you believe to be your enemy. Lift to God the prayer you wrote out and then be open in the days ahead for God to possibly use you to show them His love.

A prayer to fear the Lord and honor Him . . .
You learned in your lesson this week that for those who fear the Lord, God sends the Angel of His presence; He reveals His secrets; He fulfills your desires. Tell Him today what it is that you need most.

A prayer to endure persecution . . .
Your memory verse this week contains a promise that things will at times be difficult for you because you wear the name of Christ. Ask God for the power of His Spirit—the Helper—to assist you in taking a strong stand for your faith no matter what the circumstances.

Write out this week’s verse from memory: