The Chosen Life
Studies in Esther

Session 14 – Haman's Heartless Plan | Esther Chapter 3

History is littered with despicable characters and in this session, Haman struts onto the scene.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover how Mordecai chose the difficult right instead of the easy wrong.
- Consider what God hates and why that's good news for us.
- Pray honest prayers that instill courage and stand firm in faith.

Ice Breaker

Without going into too much detail, when is the last time you felt peer pressure? In what way?

Pride and Prejudice

Esther 3:1–6
The story picks up five years later. Mordecai's role in saving the king's life has been recorded and forgotten. That detail figures in later, but for now all eyes are on the king's new favorite.

1. Haman comes on the scene at the high point of his career. He's been promoted (no reason is given) and the narrator gives a few hints why that's going to be a problem. Let's start with the less obvious one.

   Haman's authority. Remember the king's advisors (chapter 1), that close inner circle who always had access to the king? Where do they figure in the picture now?

   What happens when you combine human nature with a shift of power? Consider what you read and share your thoughts.

   James 3:16

   Proverbs 29:5

Good to Know

Haman's promotion signaled major changes all around. By giving Haman authority over *all the other* advisors, the king essentially created a new government position. Safe to say, this didn't go over well with everyone, which may partially explain why the men in the king's gate pressed the issue with Mordecai—not out of loyalty to Haman so much as looking for a reaction. If Haman couldn't command respect from one man, he wouldn't deserve their respect either.

2. **Haman's ancestry.** Haman's animosity was deeply ingrained. For the descendants of Agag, hatred for the Hebrews had been nursed and rehearsed for generations. For Mordecai's part, no self-respecting Jew would ever respect an Amalekite. So, when Mordecai would not bow, Haman's raging ego took over. Like the hair trigger on a loaded gun, he set out to annihilate God's people.

   a. Why do you think Mordecai refused to bow in Haman's presence? Was he simply being stubborn? Did he resent Haman's promotion, while his own service was overlooked? Was this a matter of conscience for Mordecai? Consider Deuteronomy 25:17–19 and share your thoughts.

Good to Know

The Amalekites were Israel's sworn enemies all the way back to the time of Israel's exodus from Egypt, when God cursed the Amalekites for brutally attacking Israel (Exodus 17:8–16).
Later, when Saul was king, God instructed him to destroy the Amalekites and all their possessions. Saul attacked, but kept some choice animals and spared Agag, their king. When the prophet Samuel confronted him, Saul made excuses but he was rejected as king. Then Samuel "put Agag to death before the Lord" (1 Samuel 15:33).

   b. Haman's name sounds similar to the Hebrew word for wrath (*hemah)* which certainly describes his explosive demeanor. He was a hateful man who embodied the very things God hates. According to Proverbs 6:16–19, "There are six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him . . ."

   What seven things does the Lord hate? Note each one and what makes it so deplorable.

   1.

   2.

   3.

   4.

   5.

   6.

   7.

3. Put yourself in Mordecai's place. Have you ever found yourself in a confrontation you didn't choose but couldn't avoid without compromising your faith and witness? Briefly share how God shaped you through that experience.

   a. What part did God's Word and prayer have in your response?

   b. What was the outcome?

   c. Would you say your beliefs were tested? Strengthened? In what way?

   d. What, if anything, would you do differently in the future?

Memory Verse

As you memorize this verse, make it part of your prayers every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

> Do not be afraid of sudden terror, nor of trouble from the wicked when it comes;
> for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught.
> Proverbs 3:25–26 NKJV

Think About It . . .

Trusting God doesn't exempt us from trouble, but it does remind us who has control. He is never caught off-guard or tripped up. Where do you most need to be reminded of this today?

A Wicked Game

Esther 3:7–15
Haman sets his heartless plan into motion.

1. Before taking his plan to the king, Haman privately met with court astrologers to determine, according to the gods, when to massacre the Jews. Casting lots (Pur) was a ritual used to decide the future.

   a. They cast lots in the first month, Nisan (April), and it came up for the twelfth month, Adar (March). How long would Haman have to wait to carry out his plan? How did this work to the Jews' advantage?

   b. Haman let *fate* choose the date, convinced it would all come together as planned. In a way, he was right. But what was missing in his calculations?

      Proverbs 16:9

      Proverbs 16:33

2. How does Haman persuade the king to go along with his plan? What truths and half-truths do you spot in his presentation? What details does he leave out?

   a. What would motivate Ahasuerus to sign a death warrant for countless thousands of his subjects, with no questions asked?

   b. *Act now, think later*. We notice a consistent pattern in a king who can't seem to get past his own blind spot. Ahasuerus was accustomed to forming opinions and solving problems by listening to men who only said what he wanted to hear. What do we learn here?

      Proverbs 18:13

      Psalm 1:1–3

3. The decree was written in every language and delivered to every province in the Persian Empire (including Jerusalem). Imagine if everyone in the United States got a push notification like this:

   APRIL 17, 474 BC[1]
   BY ORDER OF KING AHASUERUS

   ALL JEWS, YOUNG AND OLD, INCLUDING WOMEN AND CHILDREN MUST BE KILLED, SLAUGHTERED, AND ANNIHILATED. ALL CITIZENS MAY PARTICIPATE. ALL POSSESSIONS SEIZED WILL BE LAWFULLY YOURS. THIS ORDER WILL BE IN EFFECT FOR 24 HOURS ONLY, MARCH 7, 473 BC. **THIS IS NOT A DRILL.**

   a. While Haman and the king sat down to drink, what is happening in the streets, and shops, and homes, and workplaces of Susa?

   b. What if you suddenly found yourself living under this kind of threat? What would matter the most to you? What would matter less?

"We must learn to trust God, not only in the adverse circumstances of our individual lives, but also in the adverse circumstances of the church as a whole.
We must learn to trust God for the spread of the gospel, even in those areas where it is severely restricted.
He is sovereign over the nations where every attempt is made to stamp out true Christianity."

Jerry Bridges
Trusting God: Even When Life Hurts

Gospel at a Glance: A Death Warrant | Haman's rage towards Mordecai caused him to devise an evil plan to destroy all the Jews. Centuries later, in a similar way and for equally wicked reasons, King Herod was incensed to learn that a rival king had been born (Matthew 2:3). Like Haman, Herod was willing to exterminate many in order to destroy the one who was his rival. While the child Jesus was providentially spared, He would be convicted on false charges and condemned to die. The death warrant issued against Jesus is—and will ever be—the greatest injustice ever committed. And yet, what Satan meant for evil God intended for good. "The Son of Man must suffer many thing and be rejected . . . and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (Luke 9:22 NIV).

[1]A number of dates in the book of Esther can be cross-checked with dates in surviving Persian records and related accurately to our modern calendar.

Adoration **C**onfession **T**hankfulness **S**upplication

"Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people." Ephesians 6:18 NIV

In each session, we will take time to pray—for others and for ourselves, for our church, our communities, and our nation.

As a focus for prayer, you can use the memory verse, another Scripture, or simply what the Lord has impressed on you from the chapter. No need to be profound or elaborate, just authentic.

Record your simple prayer, including each element here.

A _____

C _____

T _____

S _____

Group Prayer Requests

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