

# CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian  
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

## DHW BIBLE CLASS LESSON 3 THE BOOK OF ESTHER CHAPTER 3

### INTRODUCTION

Esther was now queen of a superpower nation. The Jews should be celebrating. There was never a better time for them to have one of their own as the Queen of the Medo-Persian Empire. However, happiness that is of the world is always short lived. People are like the weather that changes suddenly. One moment, it is bright and sunny. The next moment, dark clouds gather and lightning and thunder follow. So it was with the Jews. They might be celebrating now but soon they would be sorrowing. The pride and power of one man would ruin their good fortune.

Pride and power are deadly twins. When a man is endowed with these two things, he can do great harm to others who oppose him. This chapter describes such a man in the history of the Jewish people. However, will God allow His chosen people to be annihilated? The answer is an emphatic negative! Not only will God's people be preserved but also that God would do it in such a way that astounds. It would be instructive for us to know more about the LORD God.

God's people have always been the minority in the world, and more often than not, others subject them to persecution and oppression for their beliefs and practices. The Christians are willing to endure this in order to be faithful to their God. This is always a spiritual struggle, never carnal. And so for Christians, who are the blood-bought children of God, such persecutions and oppressions are satanically inspired, as the Apostle Paul reveals (Ephesians 6:12): *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.*

In chapter 3, we see a man who defies paying homage to another; and another, who neglects to exercise his authority; and another who abuses his power. The combination of these factors creates anxiety and havoc to any community. The chapter can be divided into the following sections:

- 1) Mordecai's refusal (3:1-3);
- 2) Haman's destructive desire (3:4-7)
- 3) Haman's deadly petition (3:8-11)
- 4) The King's deadly decree (3:12-25)

### COMMENTARY

#### Mordecai Refusal – 3:1-3

*"After these things"* refers to all the events that happened before this time, which means that some time might have passed since Esther

became queen (may be about 475 B.C.). Ahasuerus promoted Haman, and after that, he placed his position above all the other princes, and at the same time, he ordered that all the king's servants should pay homage to Haman by bowing to him. Haman was the son of Hammedatha the Agagite. As an Agagite, this suggests, that he was a descendant of Agag, the Amalekite, the old enemy of the Jews. When Israel came out of Egypt, the Amalekites attacked them for which the LORD God cursed and condemned them to extinction (Exodus 17:8-16)<sup>1</sup>.

The reason for the king to promote Haman was not stated. And the text does not in any way indicate that Haman got this promotion by illegitimate means. Haman's position was like the modern day Prime Minister of a country. But there is a difference. Haman was directly responsible and answerable to the king unlike today's Prime Minister who has to report to an elected legislative body. Haman was a powerful adversary to anyone who would stand in his way!

This chapter surprisingly begins with the promotion of Haman who had not been introduced in the preceding two chapters, in contrast to Mordecai's loyal deed in saving the

king. One would expect at the beginning of the chapter to read of the king's reward for Mordecai's loyalty. However, Mordecai was not rewarded. Instead a worse thing happened to him. In compliance with the king's command, all his servants bowed to Haman whenever he made his appearance. But Mordecai did not bow to Haman and pay homage to him.

Mordecai's colleagues working in the king's gate daily asked him why he disobeyed the king's command. But Mordecai still refused to pay homage to Haman. One day, Mordecai told them that he was a Jew and that was why he refused to bow to Haman. This was not personal but doctrinal. The word for bow means "to prostrate or to bend at the knee". This was not a Korean-like kind of bowing from the waist standing up. This was like a worshipping kind of a prostration that would mean worship. Hence, Mordecai was left with no choice but to refuse to bow. **Exodus 20:4-6** (KJV) forbids worship, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of *any thing* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth: **5** Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that hate me; **6** And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments."

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 17:14 And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. 15 And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovahnissi: 16 For he said, Because the

Mordecai did the right thing by obeying God rather than man.

### **Haman's Destructive Desire** – 3:4-7

Mordecai's colleagues gave up persuading him and informed Haman regarding the matter. Apparently, their intention was not to get Mordecai punished for not bowing to Haman. But rather, as the text suggests, they wanted to know whether a Jew like Mordecai whose refusal to bow to Haman could be exempted. When Haman realized that Mordecai, who was a Jew, refused to bow and reverence him, he was *full of wrath*. Haman wanted Mordecai to treat him as a god. Mordecai refused. The Hebrew word translated here as *full of wrath* is *hamah* (anger). It is a very strong term to describe the inner emotional feelings of a person that is filled with a burning and consuming anger. It is also used in chapter 1:12 of King Ahasuerus' anger with Vasthi for disobeying him. However, the king's anger subsided after a time. In the case of Haman, his anger did not subside but it lingered on because of Mordecai. Every time he saw Mordecai, he would be reminded of his insolence and disobedience.

The statement, *and he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone*, simply alleges that Haman scorned the thought of punishing only Mordecai (v.6). Mordecai seemed to be a representative of the Jews. Therefore, Haman resolved to *destroy all the Jews* who lived throughout the whole empire. Haman

demonstrated that he was consumed with his own lust for self-glory. The lack of respect that was shown by one foolish Jew was enough to provoke him to exterminate every one of Mordecai's people.<sup>2</sup> Why would Haman seek to destroy all the Jews beside the obvious that he was full of pride and conscious of his political status? Is it because other Jews might follow Mordecai's example? Or did he plan it so that he could enrich himself by confiscating all the belongings and treasures of the Jews? The divine author does not reveal to us the innermost thoughts of Haman. But one thing was certain, it was a spiritual battle and NOT a carnal one. If Haman had succeeded, then there would be no Saviour for the world.

So Haman sought his gods by casting Pur or lots. He did this by consulting the astrologers on the month of Nisan, which was the first month according to Jewish calendar, and it was in the twelfth year of Ahasuerus' reign (474 B.C.). Day by day and month by month, he would cast lots until an auspicious day was found. He got an answer. The auspicious day to carry out his evil plan to destroy all the Jews would be in the month of Adar that is the twelfth month. It means a delay of

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<sup>2</sup> Proverbs 30:32 If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or if thou hast thought evil, lay thine hand upon thy mouth.  
33 Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood: so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife.

eleven months! The end of this saga points to the date as the day that Haman would die! It was not auspicious for him but for God's people!

### **Haman's Deadly Petition – 3:8-11**

Having consulted the astrologers and procuring an auspicious day from his gods, Haman went to King Ahasuerus. He did not have the power to destroy all the Jews in the empire. This evil plan of his must have the approval of the king. He must have thoroughly thought through the night before how he would present his case and persuade the king to agree to his proposal. Haman went straight to the point. He began by charging that *there is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people* in the whole empire of the king. Haman did not specifically mention the Jews by name. He was a cunning and sneaky evil man. He understood the law of the Persians, which states that once a law is passed, not even the king has the power to revoke it. His strategy was simple. He has to build his case before the king such that the king will inevitably grant him his request.

Haman began by saying that the Jews were scattered throughout the empire. This was a fact. The implication is that they could pose a great threat to the king's reign. The matter involved only one of the many peoples, and the king could dispense with this group of people.

The next thing Haman brought up to the king was that *their laws are diverse from all people* (v.8b). This was a fact for a true Jew would worship the LORD God and none else; and they had certain dietary regulations that restricted them from eating all other kinds of food. While these were true of the Jews, the implication is that they were exclusive and not part of the king's subjects as a nation. They were divisive, narrow-minded and uncooperative. They could threaten the stability and unity of the Persian Empire.

Haman then added that *neither keep they the king's laws* (v.8c). It was true that the Jews did not worship the king's pagan gods. However, it was a devious lie to imply that all the Jews were not law-abiding. This was a perversion of the facts. Haman was crafty as can be seen from his line of reasoning and argument. He was most convincing. He built his case from truth to lie. He carefully selected his facts that suit him and weaved them together into a punch line that was false. His appeal was for the sake of the good of the Persian Empire!

Haman's final argument is that *therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them* (v.8d). These "certain people" should not be tolerated any more and the king should not let them continue to remain in the kingdom for they were of no use to him. This is a false conclusion. However, it worked. The LORD God had instructed them that when they were taken captive into Babylon, they were to work for

the welfare of the country.<sup>3</sup> Extra-biblical historical evidence testifies that Haman's charge is not true.<sup>4</sup> This last statement (v. 8d) seems to persuade the king to give his approval. He could not allow any potential rebellion in his kingdom.

Haman moved in to realize his diabolical plan. He asked the king in a polite way, *if it please the king let it be written that they may be destroyed*, and suspecting the king might be thinking of the cost of carrying out the plan, Haman quickly added that he would *pay ten thousand talents of silver* for the whole operation. This was a very great sum of money. This indicates that Haman was a very rich man. Why was he so generous? After all, the king could well afford to pay to get rid of a dissident minority group in his kingdom. Had Haman already calculated how much he would stand to gain by confiscating the belongings and treasures of the Jews? It was difficult not to be tempted. Greed is one of the evils of men. The more they have, the more they want. Haman would personally credit the money into the king's treasury (v.9). The king needed not to pay a dime. The king, without asking any question

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<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah 28:7 Nevertheless hear thou now this word that I speak in thine ears, and in the ears of all the people.

<sup>4</sup> The discovery in 1893 of an archive of Murashu Sons of Nippur consisting of 730 tablets from the period immediately following the time Xerxes show that a great number of the diaspora Jews made good in the land of their adoption (John C. Whitcomb, Esther, p.70)

or conducting any investigation to ascertain the truth, *took his ring from his hand, and gave unto Haman*.

A word that deserves mention here is that the divine author shows an utter displeasure for Haman by mentioning again that he was *the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the Jews' enemy* (v.10b)! The king said to Haman that he could keep *the ten thousand talents of silver*; and that he could do as he liked with the people in question. Was the king genuine about not accepting the money Haman offered to him? One wonders. However, the fate of all the Jews in the empire was sealed. They appeared to be doomed from a human standpoint.

### **The King's Deadly Decree – 3:12-25**

Haman wasted no time; quickly he summoned the king's scribes (lawyers) *on the thirteenth day of the first month* that is the month of Nisan to write the decree and sent it on that very day to all *the king's lieutenants, the governors that were over every province, and to the rulers of every people of every province* that they should take action according to the written edict (v.12). Note the three echelons of administrators who were responsible for implementing the decree. It was speedily *sent by post* to all the provinces in the empire. Theirs was a *horse-postal system*. In those days, this was their courier service, which was the best and most efficient.

The written contents of the decree *signed, sealed and sent* was that on the 13<sup>th</sup> of Adar, the twelfth month, all the Jews, both young and

old, little children and women were to be destroyed, killed and caused to perish, and to confiscate all their belongings. All the said officials were to publicly announce to all the people and that they should be ready to obey the king's command. This decree once issued could not be revoked. While the letters were being sent to all parts of the empire, *the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed* (v.15). The announcement was made on the 13<sup>th</sup> of Nisan. This date was the eve of the day when all the Jews observed the Passover - they commemorated and celebrated their mighty deliverance from bondage and oppression in Egypt.

Imagine how the announcement of the decree would affect their heart and mind? The people in Shushan were confused and perplexed, but the two most powerful men in the empire were drinking and making merry, while the Jews were grieving and sorrowing.

In comparison and contrast with the previous two feasts, the first one ended in tragedy in the banishment of Vashti, the pagan queen; and the second feast ended in celebration of the crowning of Esther, a Jewess as queen. This third drinking feast by Ahasuerus and Haman celebrated the impending destruction of the Jews. Haman was a wicked and evil man. He was determined to kill all the Jews, a people whom the one true and living God had loved and chosen to be His

possession. God would not be mocked.

### **PRACTICAL VALUE**

In life, we should be more circumspect when dealing with serious matters. King Ahasuerus should have meticulously examined more of Haman's proposed plan to destroy a minority group of his subjects. His failure to do so resulted in great sorrow to all the Jews in his empire. Similarly, when we are in a position of authority and control, we take care that we are not guilty of dereliction of responsibility and duty. Decisions made have consequences and some of them can be very grave.

Reversal in life's situations and conditions can happen instantly and without warning. One moment we can be celebrating a moment of triumph but the next moment this delight can turn to tragedy. The Jews never had a better time when Esther was made Queen of Persia. But soon their burst of exuberance and happiness turned into a nightmare when the king's decree declared that they would all be destroyed - men, women and children in about a year's time. Imagine the effect of this impending destruction it had on the Jewish people for one year! This is life and many things are beyond our control. However, all things are in the control of your Heavenly Father. Therefore, do not fret. We may enjoy the goodness of something for the moment and after that, we should realize that every thing can change for the worst.

God's wrath is upon His creatures who have sinned against Him, and they will all be punished in the Lake of fire, to be tormented forever. But while God is holy, His love and mercy equally extend to men too. He has provided the way for sinful men to have their sins washed away completely by sincerely confessing and repenting of their sins and believing and accepting Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord. The Lord Jesus Christ, His only Begotten Son, has fully paid the penalty of sin for the world, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16). Satan hates this plan of salvation that God has given to us. He will do his utmost to stop God. He has his followers and they are everywhere throughout the ages. They can be our own sons and daughters. Keep close to God and make sure that the great commandment of God is in our hearts. AMEN

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Daily Readings**

**MONDAY:** Esther 3:1- 7.

**TUESDAY:** Esther 3:8-15.

**WEDNESDAY:** Esther 3:1-15.

**THURSDAY:** Esther 3:1-15.

**FRIDAY:** Esther 3:1-15.

**Discussion Questions:**

- 1. Are all characters in the believer's life accidental? Does this include evil people like Haman? How should believers respond to these evil people doing evil deeds?

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- 2. Would you bow to idols today? What about during a Chinese wedding tea ceremony and you are asked to kneel to offer the tea, would you do it? Would you kneel in front of the whole church during your holy matrimony while the pastor prays for you? (cf. 3:2-4)

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- 3. Why did Mordecai's colleagues in the king's gate ask him for the reason why he did not bow to Haman? Was it wrong for them to report Mordecai (3:2-4)? If you were in Mordecai's shoes, would you cover-up the real reason for

not bowing to avoid being found out? Have you ever been caught in such a similar situation? Please share.

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4. What character qualities did Mordecai demonstrate (3:2-4)?

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5. Is Mordecai's non-compliance with the king's command to pay homage to Haman a thing to be emulated? Explain (3:2-4)?

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6. Why did Haman want to kill all the Jews instead of Mordecai only? What do you think of Haman's decision? Is it right or reasonable (3:5-6)?

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7. What do you think of Haman's character (3:5-10)? Should Christians practice auspicious dates in planning for weddings or other special occasions? What if non-Christian parents insist on the choice of an auspicious date for a wedding, should the Christian stand his ground or submit to parents?

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8. Why did Haman cast Pur (lots) (3:7)?

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9. What three reasons did Haman give to the king that all the Jews should be destroyed (3:8-9)? Were they true or false?

12. How does the divine writer register his distaste for Haman (3:10)?

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10. How did Haman manage to persuade the king to approve his plan (3:8-10)?

13. What would Haman stand to gain by the destruction of the Jews (3:13)?

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11. What did the king do to indicate his approval (3:10-11)?

14. What was the day of declaration of the king's decree to destroy all the Jews throughout the empire (3:12)? How significant was that day to the Jews? What was the

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day fixed for the destruction to be carried out by the people?

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15. What is your reaction to chapter 3:15?

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16. In which instance (s) do you see the unseen hand of God controlling the situation?

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