

### ESTHER 3

In chapter 3 we see a picture of the world's violent hostility to God's people. Chapter 2 has ended with the scene where Mordecai discovers the plot against the King. He has shown himself to be a faithful worker, and the kind of person you'd want working for you. Yet as chapter 3 begins we see it is Haman, not Mordecai who is rewarded with promotion. In verse 1 we are told who Haman is – he is an Agagite. Agag was King of the Amalekites, a nation hostile to Israel (you can read about them in 1 Kings 15).

Haman in his character showed the character of his ancestors, and he is clearly proud and enjoys the people bowing down to him. However Mordecai does not bow. We are not told in the text why this is – however his refusal is explicit (verse 4), as is the fact he is a Jew (verse 4). Like most incidences in Esther there is an ambivalence. He may be publically showing the fact he has a dual loyalty, and that he bows to a greater King, or the reason may not be that. Don't press this too far in the studies.

What matters is Haman's response. Notice how disproportionate it was (verses 5 and 6). He does not just want to get rid of Mordecai, he wants to get rid of all Jews from India to Ethiopia (see 1:1). He has a deep rooted violent hatred of all God's people.

Haman is a superstitious man so rolls the dice to discover a date on which to carry out this violent act. There are 11 months to go before this evil is carried out. God is at work even in apparently "random" acts of decision making (see Proverbs 16:13).

Why does Haman hate God's people so much? Verse 8 is very revealing, even if it is a half truth. Haman sees them as "different", and that they "do not obey the kings laws". This is not fully true. Mordecai has been the best worker at the city gate (remember 2:19-23), but it is true that they serve a greater King. This is always a threat to the world.

It is important as we read this chapter to see that this is simply a historical example of the kind of opposition the church have always faced in the world. Lies, hostility, a determination to wipe her out – you can see this at any point in

history. The problem in chapter 4 is not anti-Semitism (as wicked as that is), but hatred of God and his church.

The King is convinced to sign this order in to law. We know from all we've seen so far that this is very serious. Even the King is bound by his own laws (remember 1:19). The day the law goes out is significant (verse 12). It is the day before the Passover lamb is killed, a remembrance of God's great act of rescue and deliverance and a reminder of His faithfulness to his covenant. Perhaps this is a hint of hope?

The chapter closes with Susa in chaos. The godly act of Mordecai brought peace and security at the end of chapter 2. Now the reverse is true.

#### POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Was Mordecai a faithful employee of the King (remember what we saw at the end of chapter 2 – and that to sit at the “kings gate” meant to work for the king)?

Who is honoured at the start of chapter 3? Who might you expect to have been honoured?

What is Haman's reaction to Mordecai's refusal to honour him? Why is it so disproportionate? (verse 3-6)?

When you read Proverbs 16:33 then read verse 7, what comfort is there? How long will it be until the massacre is to be carried out?

What does verse 8 reveal about the motivation behind Haman's hatred? What is true, and what is false about what he says? Look at 1 Peter 2:13-17.

What is so serious about this being a law signed by the King? – look back to 1:19?

When does this law go out to the people? (verse 12). Why is that day significant for the Jews? (read Exodus 12:6). Is there a glimmer of hope in that?

What is the result of Haman's plot and the Kings law (verse 15)?

How is chapter 3 a picture of the hatred of the world against God's people throughout history?