



LIVING IN A HOSTILE WORLD  
Studies in Ezra and Esther  
Lesson 6  
(Lesson 3 of Esther)

**THE PRIDE (OF MORDECAI)  
AND THE PREJUDICE (OF HAMAN)  
ESTHER 2:21-4:17**

**I. MORDECAI REVEALS THE PLOT AGAINST XERXES ESTHER 2:19-23**

Every incident in this amazing story is important. This is also true of chapter 2 verses 19 through 23. They give us several facts and hints that are important later on.

**A. Ahasuerus Seems Disenchanted with Esther.**

Verse 19 is difficult, because we do not know if it is a flashback, a giving of the contestants a second chance or a renewed search for virgins. At any rate, it seems to imply that Ahasuerus is distracted from thinking of Esther at the moment. She has not been with the king for 30 days (4:11). This could be one of the reasons why she is hesitant to go into his presence.

**B. Esther Hides Her Jewishness 2:19-20**

Even though several years have passed since Esther was made queen, she has not yet revealed her identity as Jewess. It may be that being a Jew would have disqualified her from the contest.

Esther, childlike, obeys Mordecai, even though she is now Queen of the realm.

**C. Mordecai Hears and Reveals the Plot Against Xerxes 2:21-23**

Verse 21 shows us another incident of God's providential care for His people, even before they needed it. To "*sit within the King's gate*" probably indicated an official position in the King's government. Or it may be that Mordecai often sat there to be near to Esther's living quarters to keep himself informed of her welfare. Esther probably kept not only her Jewishness a secret, but also her relationship to Mordecai. Being the queen she was surely secluded in the palace.

Mordecai overhears a plot against the king and reports the matter to Esther, who in turn, reports it to the king in Mordecai's name. He probably reported it to Esther because he was more concerned about her than he was the king. If she happened to be with the king at the time of the assassination, she herself would be in serious danger.

This incident, of course, plays a major role later in the story.

**II. THE PRIDE OF MORDECAI AND THE PREJUDICE OF HAMAN ESTHER 3:1- 15**

**A. Haman Promoted 3:1-2**

With another strange twist in the story, Haman is exulted and all bow down to him, except Mordecai.

From this point on Haman seems to have the king's ear and is his major counselor.

## **B. Haman's Background**

We are told that Haman is the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite (3:1). Some do not think this is important, supposing that Agag is a place in Media (and it may be). However the text seems to be indicating a larger enmity between Haman and Mordecai. Mordecai was a Benjamite and thus a descendant of Saul. Haman seems to have been descended from the Agagites which makes him a descendant of the Amalekites whom God cursed (Exodus 17:14). In 1 Samuel 15:2 God swears that He will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel on the way from Egypt. Saul spared Agag, the king of the Amalekites, but Samuel hacked him to pieces.

Evidently, there were other Amalekites from whom Haman descended. Thus the old enmity between Amalek and Benjamin is continued. Had Saul obeyed God and completely destroyed the Amalekites, the story of Haman would never have happened.

Samuel prophesies in Numbers 24:7 that the Messiah would be higher than "Agag" perhaps here simply meaning "king."

## **C. Mordecai's Pride 3:2-5**

Although nothing in the text says that bowing down was an act of worship (it may have been simply a matter of respect), still Mordecai refused on the basis that he was a Jew (3:4).

## **D. Haman's Fury 3:5-6**

Haman was insulted and furious. He reasoned that if Mordecai refused to bow down because he was a Jew, then all Jews would act this way. Thus he sought to destroy all the Jews. (Haman is in a long line from Pharaoh to Hitler of those who tried to destroy Israel.)

The time of the Holocaust was selected by the casting of the "Pur" or dice which fell to the last month, the month of Adar. This was not a time for Haman to carry out his plot, but in the providence of God, the delay also gave time for the Jews to reverse the decree and defend themselves.

## **E. The King's Decree 3:8-15**

Haman did not specifically mention the Jews by name but asked for permission to annihilate the whole people. He told the king that it would rid the kingdom of a rebellious people and that he, Haman, would give a generous contribution as well as the king would prosper from confiscating the Jewish assets. The king pretended to turn down the payment from Haman but this was probably just an oriental way of bargaining. Haman convinced the king by mixing a bit of truth (the Jews are scattered throughout the Empire), with exaggeration and outright error ("who do not obey the king's laws").

There is a modicum of truth in Haman's accusation. The Bible tells us that the Jews have consistently been rebels against God and indeed could be rebellious troublemakers. Since the bowing down may not have been an act of worship, it could have been simply the stubborn refusal of Mordecai. There is a touch of hypocrisy in Mordecai's refusal to respect Haman. If he is trying to be such a good Jew then why does he refuse to allow Esther to disclose her background and religion? Esther surely bowed down to her king and to his officials. He seems to be forcing Esther to be an idolater.

Also, in chapter 6, when the king orders Haman to honor Mordecai, Haman (re-

luctantly) obeys and Mordecai willingly receives this honor. It seems that the writer is trying to tell us that neither Esther nor Mordecai are model saints.

Of course we cannot excuse Haman's evil. He manipulated the king, abused his power and hated not only Mordecai but all Jews.

### III. THE ANGUISH OF MORDECAI AND THE JEWS ESTHER 4:1-3

Mordecai must have felt personally responsible for the disaster he had brought upon his people. It is interesting that there is no reference to prayer in verse three. It may be that Mordecai like many of the exiled Jews had gone so far away from God that they don't even think of prayer in a time of crisis.

### IV. THE CONCERN OF ESTHER ESTHER 4:4-9

Esther does not seem to have known about the decree; she only seems to be concerned about Mordecai's mourning. Mordecai implied that Hathach knew that Esther was a Jewess.

#### A. Esther Is Informed 4:4

#### B. Esther Inquires about Mordecai 4:5, 6

#### C. Mordecai Explains to Hathach Who Informs Esther 4:7, 8

### V. ESTHER'S RELUCTANCE TO APPROACH THE KING ESTHER 4:10-12

Esther explains that the king's law is to put to death anyone who enters his presence without him holding out the golden scepter. She also reveals that she has not been called to be with the king for 30 days.

### VI. MORDECAI'S DIRECTION 4:13-17

#### A. Esther's Danger 4:13-14

Mordecai concluded that if Esther remained silent she would die. He seems to imply that God would rescue the Jews another way even though she and her father's house would perish.

#### B. God's Providence 4:14

Mordecai's famous question, "*Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*" This is the basis for our seeing the providence of God as the key to understanding the entire Book. It seems even when God's people are out of His will and far from Him and disobedient, they still are the object of His love. He who works all things together for good to those who love God and makes even the wrath of men to praise Him still protects His own.

#### C. Esther's Reply Esther 4:15-17

Mordecai's pressure is too great. Esther sends word that she will comply and try to see the king.

Esther's famous words: "*and if I perish, I perish!*" are not so much a mere resignation to the inevitable as they are words of courageous determination.

Esther proposes a three-day fast of all the Jews in Shushan. If they did indeed

fast for three days, the fasting would have begun on the eve of the Passover and they would not have been able to celebrate the feast. This may simply indicate the dire situation that they faced.

## APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

The providence of God is an offshoot of His sovereignty. God interacts with His creation and governs the events and circumstances of this world God rules; even over personal circumstances. All that happens to you is divinely planned. Each event comes as a new summons to trust, obey, and rejoice as each event is for our spiritual and eternal good. Even when we face challenging situations we can know that God has us exactly where He wants us "for such a time as this."

Most of our stresses are caused by our own worry and anxiety, usually for things completely out of our control. Sometimes we think we know exactly what our itinerary will be -- a job promotion, a wedding, a pregnancy, a peaceful retirement. And sometimes God checks our itinerary and says, "carry on." But at other times He must say, "No, that is not what I have planned for you. I have created you for such a time as this and brought you down this path, possibly a struggle, discomfort, illness, so that I could use you for My glory."

God has His Psalmist say for all of us, *"All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be."* (Psalm 139:16)

God has placed you exactly where you need to be according to His divine wisdom and providence! Ever since the foundation of the world, God has moved the elements of the cosmos in order to have you in the situation that you find yourself at this very moment.

It is important that you draw upon the strengths of God's Word. Again and again, we are reminded that God did not make a mistake in making each of us just the way we have been made. David said that like this, *"for you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made, I know that full well."* (Psalm 139:13-14)

It is possible to go to an extreme with the idea of the providence of God. There are some things to keep in mind:

**1. The ultimate end sought is man's spiritual good, not material benefits.** Material blessings may come to one as a result of God's providence (Matthew 6:33), but God may also allow financial hardship, illness, or other physical trials to occur if He deems them necessary for our spiritual benefit (cf. Romans 5:3-5; James 1:2-4)

**2. Some think that Ecclesiastes 9:11 indicates that there are some accidental or coincidental elements in life.** But it seems to me that God is ultimately the Blessed Controller of all things. The reality that I cannot always make this fit with man's responsibility/freedom does not change that fact.

**3. Some things may be the mediate result of Satan's activity** (Job; cf. 1 Peter 5:8-9).

**4. Some things may be the direct consequence of evil men's actions** (e.g., drunken driver). God does not take responsibility for man's sin. God's providence enables us to be victorious in the midst of such evil (Romans 8:35-39).

**5. The promise of God's care does not mean that we do not need to do our part.** For example, we still must both pray and work for our food (Matthew 6:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:10; 1 Timothy 5:8). We must work out our salvation, while God helps us (Matthew 6:33; Philippians 2:12-13; 1 Peter 3:10-12).

**6. We must not be too quick to interpret natural disasters as indications of God's judgment.** Bad things often happen to the righteous (cf. Job, the early Christians); good things often happen to the wicked (cf. Psalm 73:3-12; Job 21:7-13).

**7. We should have the perspective of Mordecai (cf. Esther 4:14).** He wondered out loud whether Esther had been placed in her position by God, yet he did not presume such was actually the case. We can only have certainty in things pertaining to God's revealed will (the Scriptures). We must remember that here is an uncertainty pertaining to God's permissive will ("If..." cf. James 4:15).

**8. We are in everything to give thanks (Philippians 4:6).** We are to be thankful for both the good things and bad things and leave the ultimate determination of providence to God. There is a sense in which we work as if everything depended upon us, and trust as if everything depended upon God.

The courageous decision by Esther reminds us of an even greater One, who not only took His life in His hands, but gave that precious life in order to deliver all who would trust in Him. He said, "...*nevertheless not what I will, but what You will.*" (Mark 14:36c).

It would seem that Esther's confidence is in the unnamed one. This may be inferred from her summons to fasting in the city and her own abstinence in the palace. One would expect that here there would be a reference to prayer but it does not come. Yet surely He heard the unuttered petition of the heart and answered it in His own way and time.