

## ***Daily Bible Guide—Daniel and Esther*** **Week 3**

### **Monday, September 24th** **Esther 3**

1 After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles. 2 All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor.

3 Then the royal officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's command?" 4 Day after day they spoke to him but he refused to comply. Therefore they told Haman about it to see whether Mordecai's behavior would be tolerated, for he had told them he was a Jew.

5 When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. 6 Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.

7 In the twelfth year of King Xerxes, in the first month, the month of Nisan, the *pur* (that is, the lot) was cast in the presence of Haman to select a day and month. And the lot fell on the twelfth month, the month of Adar.

8 Then Haman said to King Xerxes, "There is a certain people dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them. 9 If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will give ten thousand talents of silver to the king's administrators for the royal treasury."

10 So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. 11 "Keep the money," the king said to Haman, "and do with the people as you please."

12 Then on the thirteenth day of the first month the royal secretaries were summoned. They wrote out in the script of each province and in the language of each people all Haman's orders to the king's satraps, the governors of the various provinces and the nobles of the various peoples. These were written in the name of King Xerxes himself and sealed with his own ring. 13 Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews—young and old, women and children—on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods. 14 A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so they would be ready for that day.

15 The couriers went out, spurred on by the king's command, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered.

#### **Points of Interest:**

- 'After these events'—immediately after Mordecai saves the king's life, someone else gets promoted and rewarded. I would expect to read here about Mordecai's reward, not Haman's.
- 'the royal officials at the king's gate'—Mordecai and these royal officials aren't loitering on street corners and in doorways. 'The king's gate' was the place where much of the work of government took place. It seems that it was sort of an outer court, where

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minor and mid-level functionaries did their business. Access to the inner court, where the king himself was, was limited to a much smaller number of high officials.

- ‘But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor’—it’s often thought that Mordecai refuses to kneel out of religious reasons (similar to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refusing to worship the golden image), but I’m not sure that’s what’s going on here. It seems unlikely to me that Xerxes is saying that Haman should be worshipped as a god, and we have plenty of indication in the Bible that paying honor to kings and other worthy people was a perfectly acceptable practice; one prime example is Daniel allowing Nebuchadnezzar to bow to him (Daniel 2:46). If not for religious reasons, why doesn’t Mordecai kneel? As is always the case among courtiers, diplomats, and politicians, there was a strict protocol in the Persian court for how people of different rank addressed one another (*Bible Background Commentary* 487); it’s similar to standing at attention and saluting in the military. By not kneeling, Mordecai is refusing to acknowledge that Haman outranks him. Since the king has just clearly declared Haman’s rank, this is quite a bold act of insubordination by Mordecai.
- ‘to see whether Mordecai’s behavior would be tolerated’—the guards seem to think there’s enough question as to Haman’s and Mordecai’s relative rank that it’s worth asking Haman if he would allow Mordecai an exception. They apparently don’t know Haman very well.
- ‘for he had told them he was a Jew’—it’s difficult to know what Mordecai’s Jewish ethnicity has to do with the situation. *New Bible Commentary* makes the intriguing proposal that Jews tended to be more free-thinking, because they worshipped the King of kings and thereby recognized that there was a higher authority than any human king (447). In other words, it’s possible that the Jews were the hippies of the Persian Empire, and the guards are dismissing Mordecai’s refusal to kneel as another one of their crazy, new ideas. Whatever the reason for mentioning his Jewish background, it has the tragic result here of putting Mordecai’s entire nation in danger.
- ‘he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai’—it’s hard to fathom just how proud or insecure Haman must be that he would think it appropriate to punish Mordecai’s slight by wiping out an entire people group.
- ‘the *pur* (that is, the lot) was cast in the presence of Haman’—the *pur* was a die that was rolled to determine lucky days (*Bible Background Commentary* 487).
- ‘who keep themselves separate’—Haman uses the Jews’ remarkable ability to maintain their unique spiritual and ethnic identity against them, citing it as evidence that they are disloyal to the empire. Seeing as Mordecai has just uncovered an assassination plot, it’s a patently false accusation.
- ‘I will give ten thousand talents of silver to the king’s administrators’—ten thousand talents was a huge amount of money, larger than the entire treasury of Athens, which was an important city-state of the time; so, it’s unlikely that Haman is offering money from his private wealth (*Bible Background Commentary* 487). It’s more probable that Haman is saying, ‘I’ve found some money in the budget for this project.’ This is easier to see in other translations. Whereas the TNIV translates the king’s response as ‘Keep the money,’ the NASB, for example, says, ‘The silver is yours’—in other words, ‘you can decide what you want to do with it.’
- ‘king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman’—the signet ring was sort of like the king’s official signature; and giving Haman the ring is sort of like telling Haman his PIN. Xerxes is saying, ‘You can act with my full authority.’ Xerxes is apparently more of a big-picture ruler; he doesn’t like to get bogged down in the

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details. With little reason and no evidence, Haman has claimed that it's necessary to eliminate an entire people. Xerxes' response is, 'I trust you. You figure it out.'

- 'to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews'—this decree allows for militias to be recruited and equipped, specifically for the purpose of wiping out the Jewish population.
- 'the city of Susa was bewildered'—while Xerxes may not be bothered by Haman's proposal of genocide, the rest of the capital city is quite troubled by this extreme and inexplicable policy. I wonder if they are aware that this horrible and just-plain-nonsensical action is motivated completely by Haman's desire for personal revenge. They certainly seem to doubt that the government is in good hands.

#### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* do you feel like your contributions or accomplishments have been overlooked? Try mentioning your disappointment to God. What recognition were you hoping for? Why does it matter to you? Spend a few seconds listening for any responses from God.
- *For your six:* Haman can't enjoy the honor being shown him because just one person refuses to participate. Insecurity has an incredible power to steal away our satisfaction at even the biggest accomplishments. Ask God to protect your six from the destructive power of insecurity.
- *For our city, our country, our world:* a big temptation for people in authority is to conflate their own interests with the public interest. I'm sure that almost everyone who finds themselves in a place of influence starts out with a desire to serve, wanting to make a real difference in society or to do what's best for their company. A surprising number of those people end up using that influence to fly their families around on company jets or to build air-conditioned houses for their pets. In this passage, Haman ends up presenting his private desire for revenge as a matter of national security. I'm sure all of these people feel justified in their actions: 'I give so much to (my country, my company, the church); they owe me this little perk.' Pray for business leaders, church leaders, and politicians, that they would notice when they are making this slide toward personal entitlement and be able to resist it. Pray for all of us, that we would be able to resist taking unfair advantage of whatever smaller amounts of authority we have.

#### **Tuesday, September 25th**

##### **Esther 4**

1 When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. 2 But he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. 3 In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

4 When Esther's eunuchs and female attendants came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. 5 Then Esther summoned Hathak, one of the king's eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why.

6 So Hathak went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate. 7 Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. 8 He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which

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had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to instruct her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.

9 Hathak went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. 10 Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, 11 "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king."

12 When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, 13 he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. 14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"

15 Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 16 "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

17 So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions.

### **Points of Interest:**

- 'he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes'—these are the common signs of grief or mourning, apparently meant to simulate death (*Bible Background Commentary* 488). Mordecai would have a double reason to grieve: his people have been condemned to death, and it's because of something he has done. While Mordecai can't fairly be blamed for Haman's monstrously exaggerated response, he must at this point regret his act of defiance. On the other hand, Mordecai's judgment is proven to be good: Haman is indeed unworthy of respect.
- 'no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it'—I don't know whether it's simply a matter of dress code (you must be dressed in formal wear to enter) or it's considered inappropriate to mourn at court (because the privilege of being so near the king should be enough to make you happy, not matter what else is happening).
- 'she was in great distress'—clearly, even small changes of behavior are noticed in this royal court. Perhaps Esther is afraid that Mordecai's extravagant public mourning will draw unwelcome attention and speculation—in such a sensitive environment, his aberrant behavior could do real damage to his career. It's also possible that she's just trying to cheer Mordecai up. Of course, it's clear that she hasn't yet heard about Haman's decree.
- 'thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king'—even for the queen, access to the king is by invitation only. It's been a while since the king has requested her presence; so she's afraid that she might not get a chance to talk to the king in enough time to make a difference.
- 'relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place'—Mordecai responds to Esther's hesitancy by saying that this is a time for risky action. In fact, there's no way to play it safe. She can either risk death by talking to the king without invitation, or she can wait for death to come because of the king's decree. Interestingly, Mordecai doesn't talk about her choice in terms of duty, but in terms of her own well-

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being. Somehow, even in the midst of his grief, Mordecai remains confident that God will in some way rescue the Jews from this calamity. If Esther tries to save herself, by hoping that no one finds out that she is a Jew, she will be opting out of God's rescue plan and perhaps putting herself in greater danger. Mordecai's statement here reminds me of a teaching of Jesus:

For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for you to gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul? (Mark 8:35-36)

It does indeed seem a soul-forfeiting choice to try to save her life by neglecting to try to help an entire nation. I would think that such a life would be pretty much unlivable.

- 'who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?'—Mordecai now brings up the topic of life purpose. Do the things that have happened to Esther have some larger meaning? I wonder if this is something she thought about much. I also wonder how she would think about her life apart from some bigger purpose. Would she think of herself as lucky? Would she think of her wealth, comfort, and status as simply something for her private enjoyment? It seems quite possible that she might think of herself as a victim of meaningless suffering: despite all of the material comfort, she essentially lives the life of a prisoner or even a sex-slave. Mordecai sees this emergency situation as an opportunity for Esther to move beyond both her suffering and her private enjoyment into a bigger life.
- 'fast for me'—in this chapter, Mordecai has shown both inconsolable grief and a general feeling that things will work out well. Here, Esther asks Mordecai to move beyond both his grief and his vague optimism to apply himself to a very specific hope: the hope that God would give her favor with the king.
- 'for three days'—I get the feeling that Mordecai would want her to rush right in to the king, and we've seen that Esther's instinct would be to wait for the king to summon her. After their conversation, they move away from both rashness and extreme caution. Esther suggests that they spend three days praying and preparing before she takes action.
- 'Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions'—several times, we've seen Esther taking advice from Mordecai. Here, we see that it's not a one-way relationship. Mordecai listens to Esther as well.

#### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* Mordecai's decision not to kneel to Haman had unforeseen consequences for the people around him. Have you done anything recently—either justifiable or not—that ended up hurting innocent bystanders? Ask God if he would be willing to make up for their loss. You might also want to ask God if there's anything you can do to help.
- *For your six:* it makes a big difference to Esther to know that she might be where she is for a reason. Pray that God would be showing your six the larger purposes he has for them.
- *For our city, our country, our world:* pray that the number of people who are praying for the welfare of our city would increase, and that through the power of prayer we'd see positive change in our city.

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**Wednesday, September 26th**

### **Esther 5**

1 On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance. 2 When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.

3 Then the king asked, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you."

4 "If it pleases the king," replied Esther, "let the king, together with Haman, come today to a banquet I have prepared for him."

5 "Bring Haman at once," the king said, "so that we may do what Esther asks."

So the king and Haman went to the banquet Esther had prepared. 6 As they were drinking wine, the king again asked Esther, "Now what is your petition? It will be given you. And what is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted."

7 Esther replied, "My petition and my request is this: 8 If the king regards me with favor and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for them. Then I will answer the king's question."

9 Haman went out that day happy and in high spirits. But when he saw Mordecai at the king's gate and observed that he neither rose nor showed fear in his presence, he was filled with rage against Mordecai. 10 Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home.

Calling together his friends and Zeresh, his wife, 11 Haman boasted to them about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king had honored him and how he had elevated him above the other nobles and officials. 12 "And that's not all," Haman added. "I'm the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave. And she has invited me along with the king tomorrow. 13 But all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate."

14 His wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Have a pole set up, reaching to a height of fifty cubits, and ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai impaled on it. Then go with the king to the banquet and enjoy yourself." This suggestion delighted Haman, and he had the pole set up.

### **Points of Interest:**

- 'put on her royal robes'—she takes a different tack from Mordecai. Instead of sackcloth, she wears her very best clothes.
- 'held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand'—this must have been quite a frightening moment for Esther. She knows that Xerxes does not respond graciously to what he considers to be presumptuousness on the part of his queen; that's why she's queen instead of Vashti. However, just as Mordecai and the Jewish community had prayed, Xerxes receives her well.
- 'Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you'—this is not meant to be taken literally. It's meant to express the king's magnificence and generosity, but politeness (and even a healthy instinct for self-preservation) would require that the petitioner ask for considerably less.

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- 'let the king, together with Haman, come today to a banquet I have prepared'—Esther doesn't blurt out her real request right away. Perhaps she wants to rebuild some familiarity between the king and her first; it has, after all, been thirty days since they last saw one another, while the king and Haman probably work together every day. Also, we know that the king likes a good party. He might be more grateful to her and more generously disposed toward her after this banquet.
- 'Now what is your petition?'—the king knows that Esther has an agenda beyond just showing him a good time, and he repeats his willingness to grant her request. Interestingly, Esther decides to keep the game going a little longer. I wonder if this is nervous hesitation on her part, or a keen sense that the timing isn't yet right. In any case, she follows up this spur-of-the-moment banquet with a more formal invitation for the next day.
- 'I'm the only person Queen Esther invited'—Haman is practically giddy at his continued good fortune. Two nights in a row he is the only other guest at a private royal banquet. Little does he know that Esther is following the old proverb, 'Keep your friends close and your enemies closer.'
- 'a height of fifty cubits'—that's 75 feet. It strikes me as a bit of overkill.
- 'ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai impaled on it'—rather than talking him out of his irrational obsession with Mordecai or helping him concentrate on all of his good fortune, his friends and family throw gasoline on the fire.

#### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* do you find yourself knowing that there's something you need to say, but scared of saying it? It could be because you're intimidated by the person you have to talk to, or because of the importance or difficulty of what you have to say. Ask God to give you a good sense of timing, and to create the opportunity for your conversation to go well.
- *For your six:* think of the difference good friends can make in difficult situations. Mordecai encourages the best in Esther, but Haman's family fuels the worst in him. Pray that your six would be surrounded by people who help them be their very best.
- *For our city, our country, our world:* revenge has a way of spiraling out of control. It can lead to horrible atrocities, to escalating gang violence, to exaggerated responses on a personal scale and on an international scale. Revenge only ever makes things worse. Pray for a spirit of peace and forgiveness in our city. Pray that we would be a place protected from revenge's excesses.

#### **Thursday, September 27th**

##### **Esther 6**

1 That night the king could not sleep; so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him. 2 It was found recorded there that Mordecai had exposed Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate King Xerxes.

3 "What honor and recognition has Mordecai received for this?" the king asked.

"Nothing has been done for him," his attendants answered.

4 The king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the palace to speak to the king about impaling Mordecai on the pole he had set up for him.

5 His attendants answered, "Haman is standing in the court."

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"Bring him in," the king ordered.

6 When Haman entered, the king asked him, "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?"

Now Haman thought to himself, "Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?" 7 So he answered the king, "For the man the king delights to honor, 8 have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head. 9 Then let the robe and horse be entrusted to one of the king's most noble princes. Let them robe the man the king delights to honor, and lead him on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him, 'This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!' "

10 "Go at once," the king commanded Haman. "Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Do not neglect anything you have recommended."

11 So Haman got the robe and the horse. He robed Mordecai, and led him on horseback through the city streets, proclaiming before him, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!"

12 Afterward Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman rushed home, with his head covered in grief, 13 and told Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him.

His advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, "Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him—you will surely come to ruin!" 14 While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and hurried Haman away to the banquet Esther had prepared.

#### **Points of Interest:**

- 'so he ordered the book of the chronicles . . . to be brought in and read to him'—it sounds like the king is asking for a bedtime story, but I think it's more like he decides to work through the night since he can't fall asleep. He's basically going over his to-do list. Lo and behold, he discovers a major oversight: he's never rewarded the man who saved his life.
- 'Who is in the court?'—ironically the only person available to talk through Mordecai's reward is Haman, who has come in early to ask for Mordecai's execution.
- 'What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?'—still on a high from his promotion and from his partying with the king and queen, Haman, of course, assumes it's about him; so he goes completely over the top. It's a situation perfectly set up to maximize Haman's humiliation. He's asked—at least, he assumes so—to say what he most wants in the world; then, he's forced to give that very thing to his worst enemy. It reminds me of another saying of Jesus: 'For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted' (Luke 14:11).
- 'a royal robe the king has worn'—Haman basically wants to play king for a day, riding the king's horse and wearing his clothes.
- 'Mordecai returned to the king's gate'—the gaudy display, perfectly tuned to Haman's vanity, isn't really Mordecai's style. As soon as it's over, he goes right back to his normal routine.

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- 'you will surely come to ruin!'—trouble helps Mordecai and Esther work even more closely together. Not so for Haman and his family; at the first turn in fortune, they drop him like a hot potato.

#### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* ask God to save you from the foolishness of pride. Ask God to help you to live humbly, and pray that he would show you the benefits of humility.
- *For your six:* pray that your six would find themselves the recipients of unexpected honor sometime soon.
- *For our city, our country, our world:* ask God to show his goodness in some way to people who are working late or getting up early today. Pray for especially good nights and early mornings for people who are up when everyone else is asleep.

#### **Friday, September 28th**

##### **Esther 7**

1 So the king and Haman went to Queen Esther's banquet, 2 and as they were drinking wine on the second day, the king again asked, "Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted."

3 Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request. 4 For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king."

5 King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, "Who is he? Where is he—the man who has dared to do such a thing?"

6 Esther said, "An adversary and enemy! This vile Haman!"

Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen. 7 The king got up in a rage, left his wine and went out into the palace garden. But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life.

8 Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining.

The king exclaimed, "Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?"

As soon as the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. 9 Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said, "A pole reaching to a height of fifty cubits stands by Haman's house. He had it set up for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king."

The king said, "Impale him on it!" 10 So they impaled Haman on the pole he had set up for Mordecai. Then the king's fury subsided.

#### **Points of Interest:**

- 'grant me my life—this is my petition'—the third time the king invites her to make her petition known, Esther finally answers. Her response is beautifully simple: she would like to live. Especially when half the kingdom has already been offered, it would be a hard request to deny. I imagine too that it would be shocking for the king to discover that someone is plotting against the queen and her people. He, of course, has no idea that he himself is one of the conspirators.

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- ‘destroyed, killed and annihilated’—the exact words of the decree.
- ‘Where is he—the man who has dared to do such a thing?’—technically speaking, it’s Xerxes who has dared to do it: it’s his seal on the decree. Esther wisely desists from placing the blame on him and focuses instead on the mastermind, Haman. Haman’s presence at the banquet gives Esther the opportunity to confront him directly in the presence of the king.
- ‘left his wine and went out into the palace garden’—I’m amused by the fact that the author describes just how enraged the king is by saying, ‘He couldn’t even finish his wine!’
- ‘got up in a rage’—it’s easy to see why Xerxes would be so angry. Not only has he just discovered that his queen’s life was in danger, but he’s also found out that his closest advisor has made a fool of him. He must feel betrayed by Haman, and sobered at his own mistakes. Perhaps this moment is the proverbial wake-up call for Xerxes.
- ‘Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining’—Xerxes takes a walk in the garden to cool off, but Haman makes things worse by practically attacking Esther as he desperately begs for his life. Being on the same couch as a member of the harem was a serious offense (*Bible Background Commentary* 489). We might be tempted to bemusement at their quaint sexual ethics, but to get the emotional impact of the moment, it’s probably more helpful to translate the scene into our own terms. I’d suggest, ‘The king walked in to find Haman lying on top of Esther and pawing at her breasts,’ would have about the right impact.
- ‘they covered Haman’s face’—like pulling the covers over a patient who has just died (*Bible Background Commentary* 489). I think the author is trying to produce the effect of a lightning-quick death; the guards kill him so quickly that they’ve already shrouded his face before anyone can see what’s happening.
- ‘A pole reaching to a height of fifty cubits stands by Haman’s house’—here’s where I start to get the impression that Haman had not been particularly well-liked: they helpfully point out that there’s a perfectly good pole at Haman’s house they could use to impale his corpse; and they make sure to mention that he had been trying to kill the man who saved Xerxes’ life. Impaling the corpse was a way to publicly testify to a person’s crime, a somewhat more grisly version of filling the front pages with their picture and putting their name in the headlines: ‘Chief Advisor Haman Executed for Murder, Rape, and Conspiracy to Commit Treason.’

#### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* in this passage, Xerxes is given the opportunity to see his faults in a way that helps him to grow. Ask God if there’s something he’d like to correct in you. I don’t think we could even handle seeing all of our own weaknesses; so don’t ask God for a comprehensive list of your faults. Ask him, though, if there’s anything for which this is the right moment to change for the better.
- *For your six:* if any of your six are being attacked or accused by someone, ask God to protect them and rescue them. Pray for quick and dramatic changes in the situation.
- *For our city, our country, our world:* pray for our President, our presidential candidates, and other major government leaders. Pray that they would be surrounded by wise and good counselors. Pray that bad advisors would be exposed and disempowered quickly.

## ***Daily Bible Guide—Daniel and Esther*** **Week 3**

**Saturday, September 29th**

### **Esther 8**

1 That same day King Xerxes gave Queen Esther the estate of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came into the presence of the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her. 2 The king took off his signet ring, which he had reclaimed from Haman, and presented it to Mordecai. And Esther appointed him over Haman's estate.

3 Esther again pleaded with the king, falling at his feet and weeping. She begged him to put an end to the evil plan of Haman the Agagite, which he had devised against the Jews.

4 Then the king extended the gold scepter to Esther and she arose and stood before him.

5 "If it pleases the king," she said, "and if he regards me with favor and thinks it the right thing to do, and if he is pleased with me, let an order be written overruling the dispatches that Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, devised and wrote to destroy the Jews in all the king's provinces. 6 For how can I bear to see disaster fall on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?"

7 King Xerxes replied to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, "Because Haman attacked the Jews, I have given his estate to Esther, and they have impaled him on the pole he set up. 8 Now write another decree in the king's name in behalf of the Jews as seems best to you, and seal it with the king's signet ring—for no document written in the king's name and sealed with his ring can be revoked."

9 At once the royal secretaries were summoned—on the twenty-third day of the third month, the month of Sivan. They wrote out all Mordecai's orders to the Jews, and to the satraps, governors and nobles of the 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush. These orders were written in the script of each province and the language of each people and also to the Jews in their own script and language. 10 Mordecai wrote in the name of King Xerxes, sealed the dispatches with the king's signet ring, and sent them by mounted couriers, who rode fast horses especially bred for the king.

11 The king's edict granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves; to destroy, kill and annihilate the armed men of any nationality or province who might attack them and their women and children, and to plunder the property of their enemies. 12 The day appointed for the Jews to do this in all the provinces of King Xerxes was the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar. 13 A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.

14 The couriers, riding the royal horses, went out, spurred on by the king's command, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa.

15 When Mordecai left the king's presence, he was wearing royal garments of blue and white, a large crown of gold and a purple robe of fine linen. And the city of Susa held a joyous celebration. 16 For the Jews it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honor. 17 In every province and in every city to which the edict of the king came, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating. And many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them.

#### **Points of Interest:**

- 'took off his signet ring, which he had reclaimed from Haman, and presented it to Mordecai'—this reward probably means more to Mordecai than riding around on the

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### **Week 3**

king's horse. Xerxes hasn't completely changed personalities in one night; he's still going to be more of a hands-off style of ruler. This time around, though, he seems to show better judgment in his choice of lieutenant.

- 'She begged him to put an end to the evil plan of Haman'—Esther and Mordecai are now safe, and Haman has been personally defeated; but his plan to destroy the Jewish nation is still in effect. Mordecai and Esther are still far away from fulfilling their purpose. At least they are now in a much better position to do something about the problem.
- 'no document written in the king's name and sealed with his ring can be revoked'—unfortunately, we once again run up against the extremely inconvenient rule against laws being revoked. The anti-Jewish militias retain whatever authorization and equipment they were promised. However, with the king's approval, Mordecai is able to provide the Jews with the right and the ability to defend themselves.
- 'the armed men'—whereas Haman's decree is directed at all Jews, Mordecai's only applies to militia members. Its purpose is defensive. It is true that Mordecai's decree allows for the family of these militia members to be killed as well; I imagine the threat of destruction of their families is meant to make potential militia members think twice before joining.
- 'the city of Susa held a joyous celebration'—apparently, the people of the capital approve of this change of administration. This is yet more evidence that only the king ever really liked Haman, and that Mordecai seems to have gained quite a good reputation.
- 'there was joy and gladness among the Jews'—their grieving first changes to fasting and then to celebrating. Their prayers have been answered, and they are saved from being slaughtered.
- 'many people of other nationalities became Jews'—Haman had intended to annihilate the Jews. His plot is so thoroughly foiled that their numbers actually grow. People change their nationalities to become Jews.

#### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* Esther's story of saving an entire nation may be particularly dramatic, but I believe that God wants all of us to have the experience of making a big, positive impact on the people around us. Ask God to put you in a place, and to give you what you need, to be a source of blessing to as many people as you possibly can.
- *For your six:* a few days ago, we prayed that God would surround our six with good friends. Today, let's pray that God would help our six to be good friends. Pray that they would have the same effect on the lives of their friends that Mordecai and Esther have on Xerxes.
- *For our city, our country, our world:* as we're discovering once again to our deep regret, compensating for past mistakes can be extremely difficult and complicated. Especially with regards to the war in Iraq, pray for all of our political leaders that God would give them wisdom about how to move forward. Pray that neither stubbornness, nor arrogance, nor the desire to score political points would get in the way of doing what we can to recover from our mistakes.

**Sunday, September 30<sup>th</sup>**  
**Esther 9:1-10:3**

## ***Daily Bible Guide—Daniel and Esther***

### **Week 3**

1 On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, the edict commanded by the king was to be carried out. On this day the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, but now the tables were turned and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them. 2 The Jews assembled in their cities in all the provinces of King Xerxes to attack those seeking their destruction. No one could stand against them, because the people of all the other nationalities were afraid of them. 3 And all the nobles of the provinces, the satraps, the governors and the king's administrators helped the Jews, because fear of Mordecai had seized them. 4 Mordecai was prominent in the palace; his reputation spread throughout the provinces, and he became more and more powerful.

5 The Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and they did what they pleased to those who hated them. 6 In the citadel of Susa, the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men. 7 They also killed Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, 8 Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, 9 Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai and Vaizatha, 10 the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. But they did not lay their hands on the plunder.

11 The number of those killed in the citadel of Susa was reported to the king that same day. 12 The king said to Queen Esther, "The Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men and the ten sons of Haman in the citadel of Susa. What have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? Now what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? It will also be granted."

13 "If it pleases the king," Esther answered, "give the Jews in Susa permission to carry out this day's edict tomorrow also, and let Haman's ten sons be impaled on poles."

14 So the king commanded that this be done. An edict was issued in Susa, and they impaled the ten sons of Haman. 15 The Jews in Susa came together on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar, and they put to death in Susa three hundred men, but they did not lay their hands on the plunder.

16 Meanwhile, the remainder of the Jews who were in the king's provinces also assembled to protect themselves and get relief from their enemies. They killed seventy-five thousand of them but did not lay their hands on the plunder. 17 This happened on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and on the fourteenth they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy.

18 The Jews in Susa, however, had assembled on the thirteenth and fourteenth, and then on the fifteenth they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy.

19 That is why rural Jews—those living in villages—observe the fourteenth of the month of Adar as a day of joy and feasting, a day for giving presents to each other.

20 Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Xerxes, near and far, 21 to have them celebrate annually the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar 22 as the time when the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month when their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration. He wrote them to observe the days as days of feasting and joy and giving presents of food to one another and gifts to the poor.

23 So the Jews agreed to continue the celebration they had begun, doing what Mordecai had written to them. 24 For Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them and had cast the *pur* (that is, the lot)

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### **Week 3**

for their ruin and destruction. 25 But when the plot came to the king's attention, he issued written orders that the evil scheme Haman had devised against the Jews should come back onto his own head, and that he and his sons should be impaled on poles. 26 (Therefore these days were called Purim, from the word *pur*.) Because of everything written in this letter and because of what they had seen and what had happened to them, 27 the Jews took it on themselves to establish the custom that they and their descendants and all who join them should without fail observe these two days every year, in the way prescribed and at the time appointed. 28 These days should be remembered and observed in every generation by every family, and in every province and in every city. And these days of Purim should never cease to be celebrated by the Jews, nor should the memory of them die out among their descendants.

29 So Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail, along with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter concerning Purim. 30 And Mordecai sent letters to all the Jews in the 127 provinces of Xerxes' kingdom—words of goodwill and assurance— 31 to establish these days of Purim at their designated times, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had decreed for them, and as they had established for themselves and their descendants in regard to their times of fasting and lamentation. 32 Esther's decree confirmed these regulations about Purim, and it was written down in the records.

1 King Xerxes imposed tribute throughout the empire, to its distant shores. 2 And all his acts of power and might, together with a full account of the greatness of Mordecai to which the king had raised him, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Media and Persia? 3 Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Xerxes, preeminent among the Jews, and held in high esteem by his many fellow Jews, because he worked for the good of his people and spoke up for the welfare of all the Jews.

#### **Points of Interest:**

- 'the people of all the other nationalities were afraid of them'—with all of the momentum in the favor of the Jews, I imagine that the anti-Jewish militias are quite a bit smaller and more dispirited than they would have been otherwise. The potential members of these militias would be a combination of people like Haman, who had private grudges against Jews, and mercenaries lured by the plunder. When the chance of quick and easy revenge or profit disappears, so do many of the militia members. Unfortunately, enough remain that there is still a bloody fight.
- 'all the nobles of the provinces, the satraps, the governors and the king's administrators helped the Jews'—while they can't prohibit the militias from fighting, the king's officials do what they can to aid the Jewish defense.
- 'they did not lay their hands on the plunder'—although the decree allows them to do so, they don't plunder the property of the militia members. Apparently, they don't think it appropriate to gain financially from this circumstance. It's about them being saved from destruction, not about them making a quick buck. Since the only casualties mentioned are men, it also seems that the Jewish defenders don't take advantage of the permission to destroy the families of the militias. Considering the circumstances, the Jewish defenders show a fair amount of restraint.
- 'give the Jews in Susa permission to carry out this day's edict tomorrow also'—apparently Haman's sons are able to form something of a center of resistance in the city of Susa; so Esther asks for another day to completely defeat the anti-Jewish militias in the city.

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- ‘These days should be remembered and observed in every generation’—the holiday of Purim is still celebrated today.
- ‘Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther’—Mordecai and Esther are quite a team. It’s like Batman and Robin, except that it’s hard to tell which one is the sidekick. Their names are used interchangeably: Esther and Mordecai, Mordecai and Esther.
- ‘all his acts of power and might’—this reversal of circumstances is not just good for the Jews. All of Persia benefits. With the partnership of Esther and Mordecai, Xerxes becomes a better king. When the story begins, Xerxes is not even a good husband, and he is manipulated by his own advisors. He nearly obliterates an entire group of people, simply because he’s not interested. But now, he effectively rules his entire sprawling empire.

### **Taking it home:**

- *For you and your family:* what are some good things God has done for your family, your household, or your group of friends recently? Find some time today to remind one another of God’s goodness and to thank him together
- *For your six:* ask God to make you and your six partners together, like Esther and Mordecai. Ask God to give you the experience of bringing about something really good together.
- *For our city, our country, our world:* even with its effects minimized by the second set of decrees, Haman’s hatred has terrible consequences for many people. Pray against the power of hate in our society. Pray for an increase of grace, of love, and of self-control.