



The Chosen Life: Studies in Esther

Esther Ch. 3

Inductive Women's Bible Study – Lesson 3

Four years have passed since Esther became queen. Although we are told nothing about those first years, we can be certain they were filled with wonder for this young woman swept into palace life. We can only imagine the thrills and challenges of adjusting to her royal station. For all appearances, Esther embraced her privileged life with grace and humility. Though far above Mordecai in position, she remained devoted as we shall see later in the story. Mordecai served in the king's gate, most likely in some judicial capacity. Queen Esther's life is comfortable and happy, but an ominous cloud is forming on the horizon. Her world is about to be turned upside-down.

Background In chapter three we are introduced to Haman, a man whose hatred and abusive use of power throws the empire into confusion and brings the Jewish people to the brink of disaster. To this day, when the Feast of Purim is celebrated and the Book of Esther is read, the very mention of Haman's name elicits a strong response: the people stamp their feet and exclaim, "Let his name be blotted out!"

Haman's promotion made him second only to the king himself. The king even issued a special decree that all his servants were to bow down and pay homage whenever they saw Haman. This bit of information implies what Haman's own actions soon confirm: he was an ambitious man with an enormous ego. Mordecai's daily refusal to bow down sent Haman into a rage, but why did he turn his wrath on all the Jewish people in the empire?

Haman was descended from Agag, king of the Amalekites who fought against the Jews during the time of King Saul. Keep in mind that Saul was Mordecai's ancestor (Esther 2:5). But the animosity between Amalekites and Jews goes all the way back to the time of Moses. After leaving Egypt, God's people made their way across the desert only to be attacked by the Amalekites. For this, God declared the Amalekites would be blotted out (Deuteronomy 25:17-19).

When Saul became king, God commanded him to strike the Amalekites and totally destroy everything belonging to them (1 Samuel 15). Saul did attack and God gave him victory, but Saul spared Agag's life and kept the best of his cattle for himself. For his disobedience, Saul lost the Lord's anointing as king of Israel. Samuel put King Agag to death but because Saul failed to obey the Lord, some Amalekites lived.

The ancestral seeds of Jewish hatred that Haman carried were watered by his own pride. The scene is set and Haman's diabolical scheme to destroy all Jews will play out to his own disastrous end.



Getting started. Find a quiet place to study. Take your Bible, your lesson and any other study tools you want to use. Plan to spend about an hour each day on your lesson. **Pray.** Take time to settle your heart, focus your thoughts and ask the Lord to help you see with clear eyes.

“Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in Your law.” – Psalm 119:18 NLT

Esther Ch. 3 Read the passage, without interruption, two or three times. If possible, read from more than one Bible translation. Briefly describe in your own words what you have read.

With each lesson, a “working” text is provided for your convenience. You can use this to scribble notes, write down word definitions, highlight events—whatever you find useful to your own personal study. The translation used will vary from week to week.

Working Text for Esther Ch. 3
English Standard Version (ESV)

1 After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, and advanced him and set his throne above all the officials who were with him.

2 And all the king’s servants who were at the king’s gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage. 3 Then the king’s servants who were at the king’s gate said to Mordecai, “Why do you transgress the king’s command?” 4 And when they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai’s words would stand, for he had told them that he was a Jew. 5 And when Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage to him, Haman was filled with fury. 6 But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone.

So, as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.

7 In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, they cast lots) before Haman day after day; and they cast it month after month till the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar.

Babylonian religion believed the gods gathered at the start of each year to decide the destiny of men. Archaeologists have discovered clay cubes used to cast lots. They resemble dice with prayers for good luck inscribed on each side. How did they cast lots? Some speculate the cubes were rolled onto a board showing each month and day of the year. When the cubes landed on the same day and month after several consecutive throws, it was considered valid.

8 Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every other people and they do not keep the king's laws, so that it is not to the king's profit to tolerate them. 9 If it please the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will

10,000 talents was equal to approximately 70% of the king's annual tax revenues. Scholars speculate that Haman offered this funding for the Jews' destruction out of government funds rather than his own pocket. In any case, he expected the money to be recouped from the plunder of the Jews.

pay 10,000 talents of silver into the hands of those who have charge of the king's business, that they may put it into the king's treasuries."

10 So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews.

11 And the king said to Haman, "The money is given to you, the people also, to do with them as it seems good to you."

12 Then the king's scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and an edict, according to all that Haman commanded, was written to the king's satraps and to the governors over all the provinces and to the officials of all the peoples, to every province in its own script and every people in its own language. It was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet ring. 13 Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with instruction to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods. 14 A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province by proclamation to all the peoples to be ready for that day. 15 The couriers went out hurriedly by order of the king, and the decree was issued in Susa the citadel. And the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was thrown into confusion.



INTERPRETATION – *What does it mean?*

Look for a spiritual lesson. Be careful not to read into the Bible an idea that is not there. Examine each verse in light of the verses around it. To help you find a spiritual lesson, ask questions such as, “Is there a command to obey? A promise to claim? A condition to that promise? Is there a warning to heed? An example to follow or avoid?” **State the lesson in one simple sentence.**



APPLICATION – *How does it apply to me?*

We don't study the Bible just to gather information—we want to spiritually grow. Our heart needs to be open to change. The only way to move truth off the pages of your Bible and into your life is to **put it into action.**

To apply a spiritual lesson, we must examine ourselves and take deliberate steps to do something with what we have learned. Ask yourself: Is this a new lesson, or does it reinforce what I already know? What does it challenge me to do? Does it point out error in my attitude or actions? What changes does it require? Think of how the lesson relates to you and what specific course of action you will take. **Write your application in the form of a question to make it personal.**

Esther 3:1–6

Lesson: _____

Application: _____

Esther 3:7–11

Lesson: _____

Application: _____

Esther 3:12–15

Lesson: _____

Application: _____

Summary

Write a simple sentence that summarizes what the chapter is about. _____

Give a title to the chapter that will help you personally to remember it.



Take A Closer Look

**“All the king’s servants ...bowed and paid homage to Haman...
but Mordecai would not bow or pay homage.”**

Esther 3:2

Mordecai’s daily refusal to bow in honor to Haman filled the arrogant official with rage. It also created tension within the king’s gate and put Mordecai in a moral dilemma. Why did he refuse to bow? The strongest hint we are given by Scripture is found in verse 4 where it says that Mordecai told them he was a Jew. As a Jew, why would Mordecai object to honoring Haman? Bowing was not a religious act; it was social protocol for that time, much like a curtsy or bow to the Queen of England is today. With that in mind, we can be sure it wasn’t bowing down that Mordecai objected to—it was bowing down *to Haman*. By refusing to bow down to a sworn enemy of God’s people, Mordecai was courageously standing up in loyalty to God. He would honor God no matter what the consequences to himself. Take a closer look and consider what it means to take a stand for God.

The personal conflict between Mordecai and Haman mirrors the enmity between the Jews and Amalekites. For insight into the hostility between these ancient enemies, review the background information provided on the first page of this lesson.

Do your best to explain, in your own words, why Mordecai would not bow to Haman.

Mordecai stood on his principles in spite of pressure. He is not the only person recorded in the Bible for doing so. Read the following scriptures and briefly state how each person stood up for their principles and the pressure they faced.

Daniel and his friends (Daniel 1:3-15) _____

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego (Daniel 3:8-18) _____

Daniel (Daniel 6:5-15) _____

Nehemiah (Nehemiah 6:10-11) _____

The Apostles (Acts 5: 18-29) _____

Mordecai experienced pressure from his peers to compromise. When he would not bow (to Haman **or** their pressure) they stirred up trouble by calling attention to Mordecai. In the same way, a believer today might be singled out for making a godly stand on principle. What should we do if we find ourselves in such a situation?

Read and *carefully consider* all that 1 Peter 3:15-16 says about preparing for—and responding to—pressure to compromise. Briefly share what you find and be specific.

In what ways have you personally experienced pressure to compromise in your daily life or faith? What has that experience taught you?

What does God promise to those who stand up for godly principles?

Ecclesiastes 8:12 _____

Psalms 97:10-11 _____

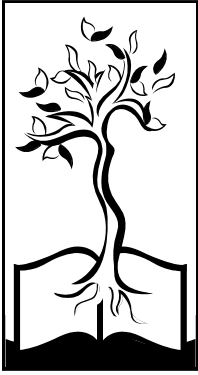
Isaiah 3:10 _____

Luke 2: 8, 11-12 _____

Hebrews 13:6 _____

1 Peter 2:19-20 _____

Is there a particular situation or area of life where you know God wants you to stand up for Him? Consider what would be honoring to God and how you will respond. Share your thoughts.



God's Word Bearing Fruit

For you personally, what has been the most important lesson from this chapter? How will you put what you have learned into practice?

Something to Think About . . .

“My conscience is captive to the Word of God.
Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise.”

- Martin Luther -

*(This was his response to civil and religious authorities
pressuring him to recant his teaching that the just shall live by faith.)*

