

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION TO ESTHER 3

This chapter gives an account of the promotion of Haman, and of the mortification of him by Mordecai, who refused to bow to him, upon which he vowed revenge on him, and on all his people the Jews, (^{<TARG>}Esther 3:1-6), for which purpose, through a false representation of them, he obtained letters of the king, and sent to the deputies of all the provinces to destroy them all on a certain day fixed, (^{<TARG>}Esther 3:7-15).

Ver. 1. *After these things*, etc.] After the marriage of Esther, and the discovery of the conspiracy to take away the king's life, five years after, as Aben Ezra observe, at least more than four years, for so it appears from (^{<TARG>}Esther 3:7)

did King Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite; whom both the Targums make to descend from Amalek, and to be of the stock or family of Agag, the common name of the kings of Amalek; and so Josephus ^{f105}; but this is not clear and certain; in the apocryphal Esther he is said to be a Macedonian; and Sulpitius the historian says ^{f106} he was a Persian, which is not improbable; and Agag might be the name of a family or city in Persia, of which he was; and Aben Ezra observes, that some say he is the same with Memucan, (see ^{<TARG>}Esther 1:14),

and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him; erected a throne for him, higher than the rest, either of his own princes and nobles, or such as were his captives, (see ^{<TARG>}2 Kings 25:28). It was the custom of the kings of Persia, which it is probable was derived from Cyrus, to advance those to the highest seats they thought best deserved it: says he to his nobles, let there be seats with you as with me, and let the best be honoured before others;--and again, let all the best of those present be honoured with seats above others ^{f107}.

Ver. 2. *And the king's servants that were in the king's gate*, etc.] Or court, all his courtiers; for it cannot be thought they were all porters, or such only that

bowed and revered Haman; gave him divine honours, as to a deity; for such were given to the kings of Persia^{f108}, and might be given to their favourites, and seems to be the case; for, though Haman might not erect a statue of himself, or have images painted on his clothes, as the Targum and Aben Ezra, for the Persians did not allow of statues and images^{f109}; yet he might make himself a god, as Jarchi, and require divine worship, with leave of the king, which he had, yea, an order for it:

for the king had so commanded concerning him; which shows that it was not mere civil honour and respect, for that in course would have been given him as the king's favourite and prime minister by all his servants, without an express order for it; this, therefore, must be something uncommon and extraordinary:

but Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence; which is a further proof that it was not mere civil honour that was required and given; for that the Jews did not refuse to give, and that in the most humble and prostrate manner, and was admitted by them, (~~1028~~ 1 Samuel 24:8 ~~1044~~ 2 Samuel 14:4 18:28) (~~1016~~ 1 Kings 1:16), nor can it be thought that Mordecai would refuse to give it from pride and sullenness, and thereby risk the king's displeasure, the loss of his office, and the ruin of his nation; but it was such kind of reverence to a man, and worship of him, which was contrary to his conscience, and the law of his God.

Ver. 3. *Then the king's servants, which were in the king's gate*, etc.] Observing the behaviour of Mordecai towards Haman from time to time:

said unto Mordecai, why transgressest thou the king's commandment? of giving reverence to Haman, which they knew he could not be ignorant of.

Ver. 4. *Now it came to pass, when they spake daily unto him*, etc.] Putting him in mind of his duty to obey the king's command, suggesting to him the danger he exposed himself to, pressing him to give the reasons of his conduct:

and he hearkened not unto them; regarded not what they said, and continued disobedient to the king's order, and disrespectful to Haman

that they told Haman, to see whether Mordecai's matters would stand; they informed Haman that Mordecai refused to give him reverence as the king had ordered; this they did to try whether such a conduct would be

suffered and bore with, and whether Mordecai would persevere in it when taken notice of:

for he had told them that he was a Jew; which was all the reason he gave why he would not reverence Haman; and a reason sufficient, because, by a fundamental law of his religion, he was not to worship mere man, but God only: and this confirms what has been before observed; for this would have been no reason for refusing civil respect and honour, but was a strong one for denying religious worship and reverence; and no wonder that the Jews should refuse it, when even the Grecians, though Heathens, refused to give the Persian kings the divine honours they required ^{f110}; yea, the Athenians put Timagoras to death for prostrating himself in such a manner to Darius ^{f111}; for the Persian kings were, as Aristotle says ^{f112}, called Lord and God, and said to hear and see all things.

Ver. 5. *And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence*, etc.] For, after the information given him, he observed and watched him, to see whether he bowed and did him reverence or not:

then was Haman full of wrath; exceedingly displeased and angry; it was such a mortification to him he could not bear.

Ver. 6. *And he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone*, etc.] That would not be a sufficient gratification of his revenge; he was too low and mean a person only to wreak his vengeance on; nothing short of his whole nation would satisfy him:

for they had showed him the people of Mordecai; that they were the Jews; for Mordecai had told the king's servants, that talked with him on the subject, that he was a Jew, and gave that as a reason why he could not and would not reverence Haman:

wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus; even the people of Mordecai; and that not merely to be revenged on Mordecai, but because he plainly saw, that both by his example, and upon the same principle with him; they would all to a man refuse to give him reverence; and therefore he was resolved to root them out of the whole empire, that he might not be mortified by them.

Ver. 7. *In the first month, that is the month Nisan*, etc.] Which was the first month of the sacred year of the Jews, by divine appointment, (^(402B)Exodus 12:2 13:4), and there called Abib, and answers to part of

February and part of March; from hence it is clear this book was written by a Jew, and very probably by Mordecai:

in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus; four years and near two months after his marriage of Esther, (^{אֶסְתֵּר} Esther 2:16),

they cast Pur, that is, the lot, before Haman; being a Persian word, it is explained in Hebrew a lot, the word signifying “steel” in the Persian language. Reland ^{f113} conjectures that this was that sort of lot called “sideromantia”. Who cast this lot is not said; whether Haman himself, or one of his servants: perhaps a diviner. The latter Targum calls him Shimshai the scribe:

from day today, and from month to month, to the twelfth month, that is the month Adar; which answers to part of January and part of February; so that the lot was cast for every month and every day of the month throughout the year, to find out which was the most lucky month, and which the most lucky day in that month, to destroy the Jews in and none could be found till they came to the last month, and the thirteenth day of that month, (^{אֶסְתֵּר} Esther 3:13), the providence of God so overruling the lot, that there might be time enough for the Jews, through the mediation of Esther to the king, to prevent their destruction; so in other nations the Heathens had their lucky and unlucky days ^{f114}.

Ver. 8. *And Haman said unto King Ahasuerus*, Or “had said” ^{f115}, as some choose to render it; nor indeed is it likely that Haman should cast lots to know when would be a proper time to destroy the Jews, until he had got leave of the king to do it:

there is a certain people scattered abroad, and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; for, though many of the Jews returned to their own land, on the proclamation of Cyrus, yet others remained, being well settled as to worldly things, and not having that zeal for God and his worship as became them, and not caring to be at the trouble and expense of such a journey, and especially those of the ten tribes; now Haman, through contempt of them, mentions them not by name, only describes them as a scattered insignificant people:

and their laws are different from all people; concerning their diet and observation of days, and other things; so Empedocles, an Heathen, observes ^{f116} of the Jews, that they were a separate people from all others in those things; for he says,

“they separated not only from the Romans, but even from all men; for, having found out an unmixed way of living, they have nothing common with men, neither table nor libations, nor prayers, nor sacrifices, but are more separate from us than the Susians or Bactrians, or the more remote Indians:”

neither keep they the king’s laws; and, no doubt, he had a special respect to the non-observance of the king’s command to give him reverence; and in like manner the Jews are represented by Heathen writers, as by Tacitus ^{f117}, Juvenal ^{f118}, and others:

therefore it is not for the king’s profit to suffer them; that is, to dwell in his dominions; he got nothing by them, and they might be prejudicial to his subjects, and poison them with their notions; and since they were not obedient to the laws of the kingdom, it was not fit and equitable that they should be continued in it.

Ver. 9. *If it please the king, let it be written, that they may be destroyed,* etc.] That is, a law made, signed and sealed, for their destruction, and letters written and sent everywhere, ordering it to be put in execution:

and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those who have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king’s treasury; this he proposed, to prevent any objection that might be made from the loss of tribute paid by this people to the king; and this was a very large sum for him to pay out of his own estate, it being near four millions of our money; it is computed by Brerewood ^{f119} at 3,750,000 pounds; for as to what is suggested by some, that he intended to repay himself out of the spoil of the Jews, it may be observed, that, according to the king’s letter, they that were employed in destroying the Jews were to have the spoil for a prey or booty to themselves, (^{ESTHER} Esther 3:13). Now this sum of money he proposed not to put into the hands of them that should slay the Jews, but into the hands of the king’s receivers of the dues, that they might lay it up in the king’s treasury or exchequer.

Ver. 10. *And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews’ enemy.*] As a token of his affection for him, and a mark of honour to him; with the Persians ^{f120} for a king to give a ring to anyone was a token and bond of the greatest love and friendship imaginable; and it may be this was given to Haman, to seal with it the letters that were or should be written, giving

order for the destruction of the Jews. It seems as if as yet Esther had not acquainted the king who her kindred and people were; or it can hardly be thought he would have so easily come into such a scheme, or so highly favoured an enemy of her people.

Ver. 11. *And the king said unto Haman, the silver is given unto thee,* etc.] The 10,000 talents of silver Haman proposed to pay into the treasury were returned to him, or the king out of his great munificence refused to take them:

the people also, to do with them as seemeth good unto thee; that is, the people of the Jews; he gave him full power to do with them as he thought fit, and who breathing revenge upon them, would not spare them.

Ver. 12. *Then were the king's scribes called, on the thirteenth day of the first month,* etc.] The month Nisan, (^{<TAB>}Esther 3:7), after Haman had leave and power from the king to destroy the Jews, and his ring given him in token of it; the king's scribes or secretaries of state were called together on that day, to write the letters for that purpose:

and there was written according to all that Haman had commanded; whatever he would have done; he had an unlimited power to do what he pleased, and he made use of it, and directed the scribes what they should write:

unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors that were over every province; the deputy governors of the one hundred and twenty seven provinces, (^{<TAB>}Esther 1:1)

and to the rulers of every people of every province; it seems there were different people in every province, which had their rulers; and these were sent to:

according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language; and letters were written in the language, and character of the language, each people spoke, that they might be understood by them:

in the name of King Ahasuerus was it written, and sealed with the king's ring. All this Haman took care to have done so early as the thirteenth of Nisan, though the execution was not to be until the thirteenth of Adar, eleven months after; partly that there might be time enough to send the letters everywhere, even to the most distant parts; and chiefly lest

Ahasuerus should change his mind, and be prevailed upon to revoke his grant; and, it may be, either to keep the Jews in continual dread, or cause them to flee.

Ver. 13. *And the letters were sent by post into all the king's provinces,* etc.] Or by the runners ^{f121}; by which it seems as if these letters were carried by running footmen, men swift of foot; or rather they were running horses, on which men rode post with letters, and which the Persians called Angari; a scheme invented by Cyrus, for the quick dispatch of letters from place to place, by fixing horses and men to ride them at a proper distance, to receive letters one from another, and who rode night and day ^{f122}, as our mail men do now; and nothing could be swifter, or done with greater speed; neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor night, could stop their course, we are told ^{f123}: the purport of these letters was,

to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar; (see ^{<TR>}Esther 3:7). The orders were to destroy, by any means whatsoever, all the Jews, of every age and sex, all in one day, in all the provinces which are here named, that they might be cut off with one blow: and to take the spoil of them for a prey; to be their own booty; which was proposed to engage them in this barbarous work, to encourage them in it to use the greater severity and dispatch.

Ver. 14. *The copy of the writing, for a commandment to be given in every province, was published unto all people,* etc.] Not only letters were sent to the governors, but a copy, or the sum of the contents of them, was published by heralds, or stuck up as with us, in various places, that it might be publicly known by the common people everywhere:

that they should be ready against that day; and fall upon the people of the Jews, and slay them, and seize on their goods as a prey.

Ver. 15. *The post went out, being hastened by the king's command,* etc.] Both to set out and make as much dispatch as possible:

and the decree was given in Shushan the palace; by the king, and with the advice of his courtiers:

and the king and Haman sat down to drink; at a banquet which perhaps Haman had prepared, in gratitude to the king for what he had granted him, both being highly delighted with what had been done:

but the city Shushan was perplexed; the court was agreed, but the city was divided, as the former Targum says, with the joy of strange nations, and the weeping of the people of Israel, there being many Jews in the city; with whom no doubt there were many in connection, through affinity or friendship, or commerce, that were concerned for them; or, however, were shocked at such a barbarous scheme; and which they knew not where it would end, and how far they themselves might be involved in it, when once a mob had such a power granted to them.