The Book of Esther – Questions & Study Notes

Chapters 3-9

Chapter 3: [[1]](#footnote-1)

**We are introduced to Haman the Agagite**. – Why is he honored? Why isn’t Mordecai honored?

Titles are important – these titles hint at racial tension.

Agagite = decendent of Agag, King of the Amalekites – enemies of the Jews (Exodus 17)

**Mordecai refuses to bow to Haman**. Why? - The text leaves this as a mystery that sets the rest of the story in motion.

Jews in similar situations bowed to their superiors (sons of Jacob bow to Joseph in Gen. 42)

There was no Jewish law against bowing to another person (just other gods)

**Haman tells the king about a people that he wants to destroy.** He lists 3 reasons for their destruction. Based on what you know, are these accurate accusations?

1. They are a scattered and dispersed people
2. Their customs are different
3. They do not follow the laws of the king

**What does the king get in exchange?**

* 10,000 talents of Silver = about 375 Tons

**Verse 11 is difficult to translate: Literally “the money is given to you”**

* Could be “keep the money” - king is freed of guilt of accepting a bribe
* Could be “Well, it’s your money” – Later the Mordecai tells Esther how much Haman has paid for the destruction of the Jews.

**What is your impression of the King after this chapter?**

Chapter 4:

**What is Mordecai’s response to the edict of the king/Haman?**

**Esther hears about Mordecai yet her actions are a little bit confusing.** Initially she doesn’t seem to want to know why Mordecai is acting this way.

Why do you think Esther responded in this way?

**Mordecai asks Esther for a very big favor.** How does Esther respond?

How do we typically respond when faced with helping another (person/people) at our own expense – financial or social?

**… for such a time as this.** Have you ever felt that you have been given a unique position to help others?

Chapter 5:

This is the first time that power is exercised by a Jewish Character. What is the outcome of this use of power?

What are the threats and challenges that Esther faces?

Esther puts on two banquets. Why do you think she does this?

Haman leaves the 1st banquet and we get a sense of what he is feeling. What are your impressions of Haman?

Chapter 6:

**The king cannot sleep** – why? – Greek translations/additions say that God is causing the insomnia.

**There are many coincidences coming together in this passage** (The King happens to read the passage about Mordecai, Haman happens to be in the court, the King doesn’t know that Haman and Mordecai are enemies, and Haman doesn’t know that the king is talking about Mordecai…) How many coincidences are needed before we start to assume God’s handiwork?

**Read Luke 14:7-11**  - How is Haman like the people in the parable told by Jesus?

“Haman is a sterling example of the foolish man warned against in the wisdom literature. Haman brings about his own downfall by not obeying the precepts of wisdom. Wisdom assumes that God rewards those who act wisely and punishes those who do not.” NIB pg 916

Chapter 7:

The king is astonished by what he is hearing from Esther. Why?

Why doesn’t the king punish Haman right away?

What is the accused crime that brings about Haman’s death?

Why not for wanting to kill the Jews?

Chapter 8:

Verses 1-3: “If the book of Ester were a movie, the screen would now fade to black and the credits would roll. The happy ending has been achieved; the villain is dead, the king and queen are reunited and the hero has been rewarded.”

Verses 3-17: The threat still exists against the Jews (the law commanding genocide is still in place). The King gives Esther and Mordecai responsibility for fashioning the policy regarding the genocide of the Jews.

* What are your thoughts about the king’s actions?
* What are Mordicai’s orders? Why not different orders that just cancel the genocide?
* How do the people of the nation respond?

Chapters 9 & 10:

In your opinion do the Jews adopt an offensive or defensive posture in the final battles?

By the end of the book who is functionally leading the Persian empire?

What is the development of Esther though out the book?

“Purim has proved to be a festival of enduring popularity, sometimes compared to the Christian celebration of Mardi Gras, which it resembled in its emphasis on feasting and hilarity. Purim begins on the 14th of Adar (sometime in March), but is preceded by a minor one day fast (the fast of Esther). On the 14th, the scroll of Ester is read publicly in the congregation. In some traditions this reading is accompanied by sound effects from the congregation.” NIB 938

1. All notes and questions inspired by the New Interpreters Bible Commentary Volume III – pages 893-941 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)