

CHAPTER 3

A very black and mournful scene here opens, and which threatens the ruin of all the people of God. Were there not some such dark nights, the light of the morning would not be so welcome.

- I.** Haman is made the king's favourite (v. 1).
- II.** Mordecai refuses to give him the honour he demands (v. 2-4).
- III.** Haman, for his sake, vows to be revenged upon all the Jews (v. 5, 6).
- IV.** He, upon a malicious suggestion, obtains an order from the king to have the all massacred upon a certain day (v. 7-13).
- V.** This order is dispersed through the kingdom (v. 14, 15).

~~1701~~ ESTHER 3:1-6

HAMAN'S HATRED OF THE JEWS

Here we have,

I. Haman advanced by the prince, and adored thereupon by the people. Ahasuerus had lately laid Esther in his bosom, but she had no such interest in him as to get her friends preferred, or to prevent the preferring of one who she knew was an enemy to her people. When those that are good become great they still find that they cannot do good, nor prevent mischief, as they would. This Haman was an Agagite (an Amalekite, says Josephus), probably of the descendants of Agag, a common name of the princes of Amalek, as appears, ~~10417~~ Numbers 24:7. Some think that he was by birth a prince, as Jehoiakim was, whose seat was set above the rest of the captive kings (~~12538~~ 2 Kings 25:28), as Haman's here was, v. 1. The king took a fancy to him (princes are not bound to give reasons for their favours), made him his favourite, his confidant, his prime-minister of state. Such a commanding influence the court then had that (contrary to the proverb) those whom it blessed the country blessed too; for all men adored this rising sun, and the king's servants were particularly commanded *to bow before him and to do him reverence* (v. 2), and they did so. I wonder what the king saw in

Haman that was commendable or meritorious; it is plain that he was not a man of honour or justice, of any true courage or steady conduct, but proud, and passionate, and revengeful; yet was he promoted, and caressed, and there was none so great as he. Princes' darlings are not always worthies.

II. Mordecai adhering to his principles with a bold and daring resolution, and therefore refusing to reverence Haman as the rest of the king's servants did, v. 2. He was urged to it by his friends, who reminded him of the king's commandment, and consequently of the danger he incurred if he refused to comply with it; it was as much as his life was worth, especially considering Haman's insolence, v. 3. They *spoke daily to him* (v. 4), to persuade him to conform, but all in vain: he hearkened not to them, but told them plainly that he was a Jew, and could not in conscience do it. Doubtless his refusal, when it came to be taken notice of and made the subject of discourse, was commonly attributed to pride and envy, that he would not pay respect to Haman because, on the score of his alliance to Esther, he was not himself as much promoted, or to a factious seditious spirit and a disaffection to the king and his government; those that would make the best of it looked upon it as his weakness, or his want of breeding, called it a humour, and a piece of affected singularity. It does not appear that any one scrupled at conforming to it except Mordecai; and yet his refusal was pious, conscientious, and pleasing to God, for the religion of a Jew forbade him,

1. To give such extravagant honours as were required to any mortal man, especially so wicked a man as Haman was. In the apocryphal chapters of this book (Esther 13:12-14) Mordecai is brought in thus appealing to God in this matter: *Thou knowest, Lord, that it was neither in contempt nor pride, nor for any desire of glory, that I did not bow down to proud Haman, for I could have been content with good will, for the salvation of Israel, to kiss the soles of his feet; but I did this that I might not prefer the glory of man above the glory of God, neither will I worship any but thee.*

2. He especially thought it a piece of injustice to his nation to give such honour to an Amalekite, one of that devoted nation with which God had sworn that he would have perpetual war (^{<1276>}Exodus 17:16) and concerning which he had given that solemn charge (^{<12517>}Deuteronomy 25:17), *Remember what Amalek did.* Though religion does by no means destroy good manners, but teaches us to render *honour to whom honour is due*, yet it is the character of a citizen of Zion that not only in his heart, but

in his eyes, such a vile person as Haman was is contemned, ~~<19104>~~ Psalm 15:4. Let those who are governed by principles of conscience be steady and resolute, however censured or threatened, as Mordecai was.

III. Haman meditating revenge. Some that hoped thereby to curry favour with Haman took notice to him of Mordecai's rudeness, waiting to see whether he would bend or break, v. 4. Haman then observed it himself, and was *full of wrath*, v. 5. A meek and humble man would have slighted the affront, and have said, "Let him have his humour; what am I the worse for it?" But it makes Haman's proud spirit rage, and fret, and boil, within him, so that he becomes uneasy to himself and all about him. It is soon resolved that Mordecai must die. The head must come off that will not bow to Haman; if he cannot have his honours, he will have his blood. It is as penal in this court not to worship Haman as it was in Nebuchadnezzar's not to worship the golden image which he had set up. Mordecai is a person of quality, in a post of honour, and own cousin to the queen; and yet Haman thinks his life nothing towards a satisfaction for the affront: thousands of innocent and valuable lives must be sacrificed to his indignation; and therefore he vows the destruction of all the people of Mordecai, for his sake, because his being a Jew was the reason he gave why he did not reverence Haman. Herein appear Haman's intolerable pride, insatiable cruelty, and the ancient antipathy of an Amalekite to the Israel of God. Saul the son of Kish, a Benjamite, spared Agag, but Mordecai the son of Kish, a Benjamite (~~<17015>~~ Esther 2:5), shall find no mercy with this Agagite, whose design is to *destroy all the Jews throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus* (v. 6), which, I suppose, would include those that had returned to their own land, for that was now a province of his kingdom. *Come and let us cut them off from being a nation,* ~~<18304>~~ Psalm 83:4. Nero's barbarous wish is his, that they had all but one neck.

~~<17015>~~ ESTHER 3:7-15

HAMAN'S MALIGNANT PROPOSAL

Haman values himself upon that bold and daring thought, which he fancied well became his great spirit, of destroying all the Jews — an undertaking worthy of its author, and which he promised himself would perpetuate his memory. He doubts not but to find desperate and bloody hands enough to

cut all their throats if the king will but give him leave. How he obtained leave, and commission to do it, we are here told. He had the king's ear, let him alone to manage him.

I. He makes a false and malicious representation of Jews, and their character, to the king, v. 8. The enemies of God's people could not give them such bad treatment as they do if they did not first give them a bad name. He would have the king believe,

1. That the Jews were a despicable people, and that it was not for his credit to harbour them: "*A certain people there is,*" without name, as if nobody knew whence they came and what they were; "they are not incorporated, *but scattered abroad and dispersed in all the provinces* as fugitives and vagabonds on the earth, and inmates in all countries, the burden and scandal of the places where they live."

2. That they were a dangerous people, and that it was not safe to harbour them. "They have laws and usages of their own, and conform not to the statutes of the kingdom and the customs of the country; and therefore they may be looked upon as disaffected to the government and likely to infect others with their singularities, which may end in a rebellion." It is no new thing for the best of men to have such invidious characters as these given of them; if it be no sin to kill them, it is no sin to belie them.

II. He bids high for leave to destroy them all, v. 9. He knew there were many that hated the Jews, and would willingly fall upon them if they might but have a commission: *Let it be written* therefore *that they may be destroyed*. Give but orders for a general massacre of all the Jews, and Haman will undertake it shall be easily done. If the king will gratify him in this matter, he will make him a present of *ten thousand talents*, which shall be *paid into the king's treasuries*. This, he thought, would be a powerful inducement to the king to consent, and would obviate the strongest objection against him, which was that the government must needs sustain loss in its revenues by the destruction of so many of its subjects; so great a sum, he hoped, would be equivalent for that. Proud and malicious men will not stick at the expenses of their revenge, nor spare any cost to gratify it. Yet no doubt Haman knew how to re-imburse himself out of the spoil of the Jews, which his janizaries were to seize for him (v. 13), and so to make them bear the charges of their own ruin; while he himself hoped to be not only a saver but a gainer by the bargain.

III. He obtains what he desired, a full commission to do what he would with the Jews, v. 10, 11. The king was so inattentive to business, and so bewitched with Haman, that he took no time to examine the truth of his allegations, but was as willing as Haman could wish to believe the worst concerning the Jews, and therefore he gave them up into his hands, as lambs to the lion: *The people are thine, do with them as it seemeth good unto thee.* He does not say, “Kill them, slay them” (hoping Haman's own cooler thoughts would abate the rigour of that sentence and induce him to sell them for slaves); but “Do what thou wilt with them.” And so little did he consider how much he should lose in his tribute, and how much Haman would gain in the spoil, that he gave him withal the ten thousand talents: *The silver is thine.* Such an implicit confidence likewise he had in Haman, and so perfectly had he abandoned all care of his kingdom, that he gave Haman his ring, his privy-seal, or sign-manual, wherewith to confirm whatever edict he pleased to draw up for this purpose. Miserable is the kingdom that is at the disposal of such a head as this, which has one ear only, and a nose to be led by, but neither eyes nor brains, nor scarcely a tongue of its own.

IV. He then consults with his soothsayers to find out a lucky day for the designed massacre, v. 7. The resolve was taken up in the first month, in the twelfth year of the king, when Esther had been his wife about five years. Some day or other in that year must be pitched upon; and, as if he doubted not but that Heaven would favour his design and further it, he refers it to *the lot*, that is, to the divine Providence, to choose the day for him; but that, in the decision, proved a better friend to the Jews than to him, for the lot fell upon *the twelfth month*, so that Mordecai and Esther had eleven months to turn themselves in for the defeating of the design, or, if they could not defeat it, space would be left for the Jews to make their escape and shift for their safety. Haman, though eager to have the Jews cut off, yet will submit to the laws of his superstition, and not anticipate the supposed fortunate day, no, not to gratify his impatient revenge. Probably he was in some fear lest the Jews should prove too hard for their enemies, and therefore durst not venture on such a hazardous enterprise but under the smiles of a good omen. This may shame us, who often acquiesce not in the directions and disposals of Providence when they cross our desires and intentions. He that believeth the lot, much more that believeth the promise, will not make haste. But see how God's wisdom serves its own purposes by men's folly. Haman has appealed to the lot, and to the lot he shall go,

which, by adjourning the execution, gives judgment against him and breaks the neck of the plot.

V. The bloody edict is hereupon drawn up, signed, and published, giving orders to the militia of every province to be ready against *the thirteenth day of the twelfth month*, and, on that day, to murder all the Jews, men, women, and children, and seize their effects, v. 12-14. Had the decree been to banish all the Jews and expel them out of the king's dominions, it would have been severe enough; but surely never any act of cruelty appeared so barefaced as this, to *destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all the Jews*, appointing them *as sheep for the slaughter* without showing any cause for so doing. No crime is laid to their charge; it is not pretended that they were obnoxious to the public justice, nor is any condition offered, upon performance of which they might have their lives spared; but die they must, without mercy. Thus have the church's enemies thirsted after blood, the *blood of the saints and the martyrs of Jesus*, and drunk of it till they have been perfectly intoxicated (⁴⁶⁷¹⁶Revelation 17:6); yet still, like *the horse-leech*, they cry, *Give, give*. This cruel offer is ratified with the king's seal, directed to the king's lieutenants, and drawn up in the king's name, and yet the king knows not what he does. Posts are sent out, with all expedition, to carry copies of the decree to the respective provinces, v. 15. See how restless the malice of the church's enemies is: it will spare no pains; it will lose no time.

VI. The different temper of the court and city hereupon.

1. The court was very merry upon it: *The king and Haman sat down to drink*, perhaps to drink "Confusion to all the Jews." Haman was afraid lest the king's conscience should smite him for what he had done and he should begin to wish it undone again, to prevent which he engrossed him to himself, and kept him drinking. This cursed method many take to drown their convictions, and harden their own hearts and the hearts of others in sin.

2. The city was very sad upon it (and the other cities of the kingdom, no doubt, when they had notice of it): *The city Shushan was perplexed*, not only the Jews themselves, but all their neighbours that had any principles of justice and compassion. It grieved them to see their king so abused, to see *wickedness in the place of judgment* (²¹⁸¹⁶Ecclesiastes 3:16), to see men that lived peaceably treated so barbarously; and what would be the

consequences of it to themselves they knew not. But the king and Haman cared for none of these things. Note, It is an absurd and impious thing to indulge ourselves in mirth and pleasure when the church is in distress and the public are perplexed.