

Act 2

Esther Chapters 3-5

If Esther is thought of as being like a melodrama, then these chapters are the second act. In this act the villain is introduced and he shows his devious wickedness. Try reading all three chapters together before you or your group attempt to answer the questions.

It may be of interest that the kings of Persia had at least 5 capital cities. They appear to have used them at different times of the year eg, one was a summer palace. For photographs of the greatest capital city, Persepolis, go to this link http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/MUS/PA/IRAN/PAAI/PAAI_Harem_Xerxes.html. Though the photographs are not Susa, the archaeologists call this building in Persepolis, "The Harem of Xerxes."

It is not unreasonable to expect that Susa had a similar building, but perhaps not as ornate. Can you imagine Esther living in such a building, getting prepared for just one night with Xerxes? Is it hard to imagine Mordecai pacing up and down outside, trying to get news of his niece.

What's going on in this section?

- The events of chapter 3 occur around 4 years after Esther has been made queen (cf. 2:16; 3:7). We don't know why Haman rose to be Grand Vizier (second only to the king and with independent authority) at this point in time. Perhaps those wise men listed in 1:14 had lost credibility after Xerxes failed war against Greece. But what do we know about Haman? (3:1, 2, 6)
- What would you say about anyone who organises genocide, in this case the total annihilation of the Jews? Is there any reason given for Haman's anti-Semitism?
- Remember, Haman's decision included all those who had returned to Jerusalem. What real threat does genocide have to God's plan for a Messiah?
- How do you explain Mordecai's refusal to acknowledge Haman's position (3:3;5:9)? Mordecai wasn't asked to worship Haman.
- If Haman's identity as an "Agagite" is like describing Mordecai as an Benjamite (2:5), then what can you learn from the original battle between Saul, a Benjamite and the first Agag? 1 Sam 15:1-9.
- How old is the tension between Amalek and Israel (1 Sam 15:2; look at Ex. 17:8-16)? What do you think God commands the continuation of the animosity in Deut 25:17-19? Could Mordecai be aware of this?

- Could Mordecai have known of Daniel's friends' refusal to bow down (Dan 3)? Remember, as little as 50 years before these events, Daniel himself ended up in a lion's den after ignoring a king's decree and persevering in prayer.
- Can you think of other biblical episodes where a systematic attempt is made to wipe out the Jews, or at least the male babies?
- Why don't the Jews pray as well as mourn (4:3) and fast (4:15)? Can you find any reference to God in these chapters?

What about us here and now?

- The story of Job lets us see behind the scenes in heaven. There God allows Satan to attempt to destroy his hero, Job. What does Satan gain if Job abandons his belief in the goodness of God? If Satan were behind Haman's pride and jealousy, what does he stand to gain by eliminating the Jews?
- With the exception of the Greek city states, the Persian Empire at this time was the centre of the world. There were no other kingdoms to rival it. Yet at its head was a fool! Has anything changed today? Can you think of any examples today where a foolish man/woman leads a nation and is influenced by advisors?
- How do you respond to Mordecai's message to Esther (4:12-14)? Are there features that you would expect to be included by a faithful Jew?
- What about Esther's response? Is there anything lacking from a Jewish heroine (4:15-16)? Is there any difference between what Esther says and fatalism?
- Any act of a good play contains actions or comments that are of significance for the future. Do you see any of these in these chapters?

So what can I do?

- What ought we to be praying for regarding our government?
- Why is it important to realise that behind all evil events are both God and Satan?