

Nov 12 – Esther 3-4

### Chapter 3

Haman –the villain of this story- is now introduced as the King’s right hand man. When Jews read this story today, they spit or hiss when Haman’s name is read. Just like people would have been expected to pay homage to the king, so it seems that people were expected to pay homage (obeisance) to the king’s right hand man. Mordecai –following a similar pattern found in the book of Daniel- refuses to compromise his faith by bowing down in worship to anyone besides the one true God. Haman’s minions tell Haman what happened to see if Mordecai would be let off the hook, or if he would face the consequences for violating the king’s command. Haman was infuriated, his ego deeply offended. Instead of just vowing condemnation on the one man who refused to bow down to him, he vows genocide for all of Mordecai’s people throughout the vast Persian empire. This is a lofty expectation to have made before speaking to the king, this just goes to show how gullible and malleable the king’s officials knew him to be. They just did whatever they wanted and then got the king’s seal of approval based on his trust in their relationship, rather than his examining of the facts. Haman and his minions draw lots for what day their genocide would be carried out, it fell on a day 11 months in the future, THEN they approached the king for his seal of approval on their plot. Instead of specifically naming the Jews, he keeps his proposal vague, “there is a certain people.... Who are different from us.... Who do not keep the king’s laws...” This is the same playbook that’s been used to drum up fear and anti-Semitism throughout history, the same playbook being used today to promote fear about “outsiders living among us.” Haman twists the king to his will, showing the king that his plan is one that would uphold the king’s laws and interests. Haman promises to pay the king’s treasury 10,000 talents of silver from his own bank account in exchange for this favor. Today we might call this bribery or lobbying. The king, once again, gives up his own honor and power by handing over his signet ring to Haman, thus shaming himself. Letters with this plot went out across the Persian empire, in all the languages necessary, written in the name of the king, giving orders to not only kill every man, woman, and child among the Jews, but also to plunder their property on a certain day in 11 months time. As a sign of how callous and out of touch the king and Haman are, they drink and celebrate while the city of Susa (and all the other provinces which received this edict) are thrown into chaos.

## Chapter 4

Tearing one's clothes and wearing sackcloth and ashes is a sign of lament, repentance, and mourning in the Jewish culture. Mordecai and all of the other Jews in the kingdom enacted the same mourning protocol in response to the edict of genocide. Mordecai came as far as the king's gate, but could not come inside (even though he was an official) because sackcloth and ashes were not considered appropriate attire in the royal court. It seems that Esther is obviously also out of touch, as she seems to have no idea about why Mordecai would be acting in this way. She obviously has not heard about the edict to kill the Jews, for she sends clothes to Mordecai so that he will once again have access to the royal court. Mordecai responds through the messenger with the story of Haman's bribery for the blood of the Jewish people, and sent the eunuch with a copy of the edict and a charge for Esther to petition the king on behalf of her people. Esther responded back that it's been 30 days since the king has summoned her, and no one can speak to the king –not even his own wife–without being summoned by him. The penalty for breaking this law is death. Mordecai encourages her to gain the courage she needs to speak to the king and save her people. He makes a faith statement about God's fidelity to the Jewish people, saying that even if she doesn't do it God will surely redeem them somehow, for that is just who God is and how God cares for God's people. BUT, he helps Esther make meaning out of the good fortune of finding herself in a place of power, honor, privilege (royal dignity). He doesn't say that God's the one who put her on the throne, but it's implied. And with great power, honor, privilege, comes great responsibility. That pep talk (via eunuch) gave Esther the courage she needed to remember who she was, whose she was, and for whom she was responsible. Esther commands Mordecai to call all the Jews in Susa to fast and pray on her behalf, so that she would find favor with the king (and not death) through her law-breaking visit. Even Esther herself and her maids fast and pray –preparing spiritually for the spiritual warfare Esther is about to wage on the enemies of her people. This fasting is a counterpoint to the seemingly endless Persian drinking and feasting in this story.