

Learning to Trust God's Unseen Hand

A Study of Esther

Esther 3:1-15

Lesson #5: Standing with the Lord requires a strong and unwavering faith in God.

- Verses 1-6

- o The events of this chapter take place just over four years after Esther was named queen.¹
- o We are now introduced to the villain. We know little detail as to his rise to power, but we know by virtue of his name that his preceding generations were enemies to the Jews.
- o A deliberate attempt to classify Haman as the modern incarnation of Agag, an ancient enemy of the Jews. Agag was an Amalekite king who Yahweh, through the words of Samuel, ordered Saul to execute (1 Sam 15:3); Saul failed to do so. Here, the Jews are still suffering from this mistake—showing the long-term effects of not following God's will.²
- o We see the corruption of his character upon receiving the high honor bestowed upon him by Xerxes. His lust for power is immediately contrasted with Mordecai's refusal to bow down as a sign of worship.
- o Mordecai finally introduces himself not only as a Jew, but that his ethnicity bears upon his response to Haman. His identity determines his actions.

- Verses 7-11

- o In looking for a way to remove Mordecai, Haman first resorted to the casting of lots, the guidance of omens, to obtain direction to select a month and a day to achieve it. He believed in lucky days—as many people sadly still do. He personally watched as ‘**they cast the pur**’ (3:7). Stones or marked objects were probably thrown together in an urn, shaken to mix them up together, and then one drawn out to decide the outcome. Various incantations may have been uttered over the urn in the process. This practice of casting the lot was common practice in the East, and was used by the Israelites themselves when they settled in the land of Canaan.³
- o Furthermore, Haman was devious in revealing the identity of those whom he wished annihilation. Prime also notes: “He (Haman) deliberately withheld their name lest the

¹ John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2012), Es 3:1.

² Ibid.

³ Derek Prime, *Unspoken Lessons About the Unseen God: Esther Simply Explained*, Welwyn Commentary Series (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2001), 62.

king should identify individuals whom he knew and respected among them. He was trying to create a prejudice against the whole of the Jewish people on the grounds of one person's actions.”⁴

- Haman’s desire was such that he would give an incredible amount of financial resources to the government in order to win approval. This enormous bribe is calculated to have been about two-thirds the annual revenue of the Persian Empire under King Darius.⁵
- Calculating a modern day value shows the incredible amount of financial resources available to Haman: 1 talent = to 34kg. 1kg of silver is worth \$460.72. So when you do the math, Haman’s bribe was worth in excess of \$156 million.
- The use of the signet was to say that the King approved and signed off as an equal party. But to relinquish such a powerful symbol was a grave mistake on the part of Xerxes. As H.D.M. Spence note, “nothing was requisite to give authority to an edict but the impression of the royal seal.”⁶

- Verses 12-15

- The remaining verses are mostly straightforward, describing the process by which this edict would be distributed among the kingdom.
- H.D.M. Spence describes the currier system this way: “The Persian system of posts is thus described by Xenophon, who attributes its introduction to Cyrus:—“Stables for horses are erected along the various lines of route, at such a distance one from another as a horse can accomplish in a day. All the stables are provided with a number of horses and grooms. There is a post-master to preside over each, who receives the despatches along with the tired men and horses, and sends them on by fresh horses and fresh riders. Sometimes there is no stoppage in the conveyance even at night; since a night courier takes up the work of the day courier, and continues it. It has been said that these posts outstrip the flight of birds, which is not altogether true; but beyond a doubt it is the most rapid of all methods of conveyance by land”⁷
- The most horrifying sight in the narrative so far is in this verse. The death document had been issued, and “the king and Haman sat down to drink.” The text does not use the king’s name, but it does mention Haman by name and thus highlights the fact that this pogrom was his idea.⁸

⁴ Ibid., 63.

⁵ R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version* (Orlando, FL; Lake Mary, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2005), 683.

⁶ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *Esther*, The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 73.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, electronic ed., vol. 10, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 332.

- I. Standing with the Lord requires us to know and express our identity in Christ.**
 - A. Mordecai saw no distinction between his existence and his identity with Christ.
 - B. We, too, must be just as resolved that our identity as the bride of Christ is my first and foremost concept of identity. It directs me, not the other way around.
 - C. "If you can't tell the difference between the church and the culture, it isn't that the church has been victorious over the culture, it's because the culture has been victorious over the church." — [Albert Mohler](#)
 - D. What has your identity cost you? How does your identity direct you? More on this in the next point.

- II. Standing with the Lord requires us to be included in His suffering.**
 - A. A central tenant of discipleship is “taking up our cross.” The world’s way of rejecting us. What is now worn as an accessory or piece of jewelry or clothing was not seen that way to the first century Palestinian Jew...and should not be seen that way to us either. Christ’s words indicate as much in Luke 9:23-25. The cross was a symbol of cultural rejection, guilt, and shame. It was the way Jesus said we would be following him. Not everyone wants that, but properly standing with the Lord requires us to take up our cross.
 - B. Dear friends, let us not water down the heart of the message of the cross. I do not stand in judgment of those who wear the cross as jewelry or clothing...but do understand that the way in which the cross is presented does bear a message.
 - C. In quoting Christopher N.T. Wright on this matter, he writes: “I wish now that I had taken it to the checkout, paid for it, and then stamped on it before leaving the Christian bookstore of the Christian church where I saw it. It horrified me as a piece of blasphemous syncretism. It was a small statue of a cross wrapped in an American flag. What were its manufacturers thinking? What message was any purchaser supposed to read into it? It seemed to say, ‘You can have the cross of Jesus, and all your sins forgiven, and have it wrapped in patriotism too. You don’t even need to think that the cross might cut across the very thing you patriotism symbolizes, or the at the cross was where patriots of Jesus’ day put traitors and terrorists.’ Or was it saying, ‘Jesus died for Americans.’ That’s true, but did he not also die for people of all nations, of all flags and none? In other words, even the most charitable interpretation of such symbolism was confusing. That’s syncretism: mixing the supposed worship of the living God of the Bible with all kinds of other loves and

loyalties. It is not something that happens only in foreign countries with ‘other religions.’”⁹

III. Standing with the Lord will be accompanied by perilous times in which we do not know the outcome.

- A. We have the benefit of the rest of the story at our fingertips. The Jew receiving this edict did not.
- B. “Real-time” walking with Jesus requires a “real-time” faith. This was the nature of Christ’s directive for us to pray for our daily bread, not future bread. Additionally, the Persian Jew would hopefully remember that the Lord was still Jehovah-Jireh, meaning “the Lord provides.”
- C. They had to learn to live on fresh manna. Fresh manna and daily bread could only be eaten while on a diet of “faith.”
- D. Likewise, we are faced with circumstances in which we wish we could know the future, but a known future has little room for faith in Christ.

⁹ Christopher N.T. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 153.