

In April, we started to explore **the book of Esther**.
The **first part** of Esther's story, concluded when
A pretty young Jewish girl, won a beauty contest,
And became **the Queen of Persia**. (in December 479 BC)
(Which was in the **7th year of King Xerxes reign**)

*BUT ~ Since this is: history ... & not just a fairy tale,
We didn't read **'And they all lived happily ever after'***

Nothing, could be further from the truth !

Reading from: Esther Chapter 3. Vs 1-7

Firstly, some historical background:

Haman's father, is described as an '**Agagite**'

The **Jewish** historian: '**Josephus**' explains that '**Agag**'
Was often used ... as an **alternative** name,
For '**Amalek**' and the '**Amalekites**'

The **1st man** named **Amalek**, was **Esau's** grandson.

So Haman's **bitterness toward the Jews**,
Started **with his ancestors, & a family feud of hate**.
He was descended from **Agag**, the **Amalekite** king, that
God commanded **King Saul** to destroy. **1 Sam.15 v.2,3**
The first mention of the '**Amalekites**' is in: **Genesis 14.v7**

About, 600 years later ~ they re-appear in **Exodus**,
Soon after Moses brought the Israelites ~ out of Egypt.

Exodus,17. says:

**v.8. While the people of Israel were still at Rephidim,
The warriors of Amalek came to fight against them.**

Moses commanded Joshua:

Call the Israelites to arms, & fight the army of Amalek.

**v.16. (Moses) said: They have dared to raise their fist
against the Lord's throne, so now the Lord will be
at war with Amalek, generation after generation.**

Turning over to:

**Deuteronomy 25.v.17,18: Never forget what the
Amalekites did to you, as you came from Egypt.**

**They attacked you when you were exhausted and weary
And they struck down those who were lagging behind.**

They had no fear of God.

From... **the first mention** of the Amalekites in Genesis

To their descendent: **Haman,**

Is over 1,600 years !

Several times, Israel's army defeated them in a battle.

But **Saul** ~ & the kings that followed him.

Never **totally annihilated them**, as God had instructed.

Some Christians, have found it, hard to understand
Why ~ God would ever, give such an instruction !
Perhaps, **part of the answer**, is found here in Esther:
We believe: **God knows, what will happen in the future.**

All these years haven't **changed** or **softened the hatred**
Amalek ~ repeatedly chose ~ to continue the **feud**,
And their ongoing hatred of the **Jews ~ for ever.**

Chapter 3.v2, **But Mordecai refused to bow down**
or show him (ie. Haman) respect.

Haman's family lineage was clear:

From **his father's title** as an **Agagite**. (Ch.3. v1)

Mordecai's only comment (v4) on his refusal to bow
Down to **Haman** ~ was that he (**Mordecai**) was a Jew.

The usual form of '**Bowing down**' could be thought of:
As **idolatry**, by **Mordecai** ... added to which,
He refused: **to show any respect**: for an **Amalekite**.

Let's continue reading Ch.3: vs.8-11

Haman ~ The newly appointed **Prime Minister**,
Would fit into many political situations today.

He was ‘**a smooth talker**’ who could express his desire
To completely destroy, **A whole racial group: the Jews.**
While saying ~ he was just defending the realm.

In Persia’s huge Empire ... (**of many countries**)
There’d be ~ various occasions ~ when a particular:
Rule of law, **was not obeyed, for cultural reasons.**
Without it being: **A sign of rebellion,**
Against the ‘authority’ of the King.

But ~ **Haman** ... without offering any details,
Makes a **sweeping statement** to the king, saying:
‘and they refuse to obey, even the laws of the king’

&, he offered an **extraordinary** amount of **money**, as a
‘**Sweetener**’ to encourage the king to **approve** his plan.
10,000 talents of silver = 375 tons. That weight has:
A present day value, (in N.Z.\$’s) of: **\$224, million !**

But Xerxes ~ confident in his trust, of his new PM.
Failed to ask Haman: ~ who are these people ?
Or how, he’d acquired, the money he was offering ?

The king just said: **Keep the money !**
But go ahead and do as you like, with these people.

Some scholars believe: ~‘**keep the money**’~ was just:
The initial step, of the ‘**Eastern**’ **bargaining** process.

Mordecai believed ~ the **silver** would be paid into:
The Royal Treasuries (chapter 4.v7)

Within 2 weeks, **Haman** had called in the King’s
Secretaries and dictated letters:

To the appropriate officials, all over the empire. (v.12)

And ‘sealed’ them with the King’s ring.

Which had the same authority ~ as the king’s signature.

This happened in the 12th year of Xerxes reign.

So it was five years ~ after Esther became Queen.

Reading on in, Ch.3.

V13b: The letters decreed that **all Jews** ~ young & old,
Including women & children ~ must be: killed,
Slaughtered, & annihilated, **on a single day.**
This was scheduled to happen, nearly a year later.
On the 7th of March, 473. BC. (In our calendar)

This being the: ‘**lucky**’ **date:**

Haman had selected by ... ‘**Casting lots**’

We would call it: ‘**rolling the dice**’

The Hebrew name for ‘**lots**’ is ‘**Purim**’.

An Archaeologist, digging at the site of Susa, (about 1890)
Found a four sided prism, (**show**). (Probably of clay pottery)
It had the numbers: 1, 2, 5 & 6, engraved on its 4 sides.

This would be **their version**: of our dice ... & used:
To determine the **date**, that would be the '**luckiest**'

Being very superstitious:

Haman, **began his search** for the 'luckiest date'
By choosing the 'luckiest time' ... Quote:

'The beginning of the new year was an especially
appropriate time, for Haman to resort to '**Divination**'

Because, according to the Babylonian religion:
'**At that time, the gods come together to fix the fate**
of men' (from: **Esther**, a commentary. by Dr John Whitcomb)

The '**Decree**' (or '**Edict**') ~ *they mean the same thing.*
said: **The property of the Jews,**
Would be given to those who killed them.

A copy of this decree was to be issued:
In every province, & made known to all the people,
So that they would be: ready to do their duty,
On the appointed day.

At the Kings command ~ (via Haman's instruction)
The decree went out by the swiftest messengers,
And it was proclaimed in the fortress of Susa.

Then the King and Haman, sat down to drink.
But ~ the city of Susa ~ fell into confusion.

So, why ~ was there confusion ?

The decree, gave no reason, for this sudden decision
No doubt, there were many people in the city,
Who were shocked ~ & feared ~ 'Who will be next'?

Because they knew ~ that for many years:
The Persians, had been supportive of the Jews,
King Cyrus ~ (Xerxes' grandfather)
Had allowed: many Jews to return to Jerusalem,
And even, ordered **an offering to be collected**,
For **re-building** the Temple.

Some time later, **King Darius** ~ (Xerxes' father)
Commanded Israel's enemies: **to leave the Jews alone**.
So they could **complete**: the **re-building** of the Temple

Suddenly ~ Xerxes' decree, (which was really Haman's)
Showed... **a totally different, racial attitude !**

Haman was behaving ~ like: **A terrorist, of today.**
Making people **terrified**, to displease or disobey him.

(We'll summarise some, of ch.4, & read some)

When Mordecai learned about the decree,
He tore his clothes and put on sackcloth & ashes.

Crying with a loud and bitter wail.

A sign: **of despair ~ of mourning & repentance.**

Similar **mourning** by **all the Jews**,

Began, **all over the Empire.**

When **Queen Esther's** servants told her,
That Mordecai was in mourning.

She sent him new clothes,

But of course he refused to accept them.

So she sent **Hathach**, a eunuch,

Who acted, as her '**Private Secretary**' (chapter. 4.v5)

To ask Mordecai **the reason** for his mourning.

4. v7. Mordecai told him the whole story and told him
how much money, **Haman** had promised to pay into
The Royal Treasury, for the destruction of the Jews.
Mordecai gave **Hathach** a copy of the decree
Issued in Susa **that called for the death of all Jews,**

And he asked **Hathach** to show it to **Esther**.
He also asked **Hathach** to explain it to her,
and to urge her to go to the king
to beg for mercy, and plead for her people.

(Esther probably couldn't read: the Persian script)

Esther replied:

The whole world knows, that anyone who appears before the king in his inner court, without being invited, is doomed to die, **unless ...** the king holds out his golden sceptre. And the king has not called for me to come to him in more than a month.

So **Hathach** gave **Esther's** message to **Mordecai**.

And he replied:

Don't think for a moment that you will escape
There, in the palace, when all other Jews are killed.
If you keep quiet, at a time like this.

Deliverance for the Jews will arise from some
Other place, but you and your relatives will die.

What's more ... who can say, but that you have been
elevated to the palace ... for just such a time as this ?

Then Esther responded: **Go and gather together:
All the Jews of Susa, and fast for me.
Do not eat or drink ~ for three days ~ night or day.
My maids and I, will do the same.**

**And then, though it is against the law,
I will go in to see the king.
If I must die, I am willing to die.**

v17. **So Mordecai went away and did as Esther told him**

The fear is real. The whole Jewish race.
Is consigned to: **‘Death row’**
And all because of one man’s pride, self importance,
And a personal hatred of the Jews,
That was probably, taught to him ~ by his father !

In a similar way:

The attitudes of many political leaders,
Around the world today ... are not new,
But symbolic: ~ Of man’s rebellion against God.
In Russia, China, Iran, Nigeria, Congo (to name a few)

It’s hard for us to imagine ~ the **fear** that Esther had to
Endure, as she prepared to face the king.

But, when Esther accepted Mordecai's challenge:

To do what she could ~ to save her people,

She didn't immediately rush into the King's presence.

- Instead ... She proposed a 3 day fast ~ **a delay**,
- While they **'prayed & waited on the Lord'**
- During this time: **they calmed their emotions**,
- **Carefully thought about ~ how to proceed**,
- And placed their problem, **in the hands of God**.
- Because they knew it was much **bigger**,
Than they could handle alone !

During such times ~ **God prepares, our hearts.**

& He also prepares, the hearts, of the 'other' people.

Continuing ~ from chapter 5. v1-8:

Three days later, Esther put on her royal robes
and entered the **inner court** of the Palace,
just across from the king's hall.

The king was sitting on his royal throne,
facing the entrance.

When he saw Queen Esther standing there

In the inner court, he welcomed her,

Holding out the golden sceptre to her.

So Esther approached and touched its tip.

Then the King asked her,
“What do you want Queen Esther ?
What is your request ?
I will give it to you, even if it is half the kingdom.”

And Esther replied:
‘If it please your Majesty, let the king and Haman
Come today, to a banquet I have prepared for the king.’
The king turned to his attendants and said,
‘Tell Haman to come quickly to a banquet,
As Esther has requested.’

So the king and Haman went to Esther’s banquet.
And while they were drinking wine,
The king said to Esther,
‘Now tell me ... what you really want,
What is your request ?
I will give it to you, even if it is half the kingdom’

Esther replied, ‘If your majesty is pleased with me
And wants to grant my request,
Please come with Haman tomorrow
To the banquet I will prepare for you.

Then tomorrow, I will explain what this is all about’

The King is puzzled, it must be **something important**,
For Esther to risk her life ~ approaching him directly.
And when she **deferred to explain**, until the next day,
He knew it must be: **taking a lot of courage**,
To tell him her request. **But ... what could it be ?**
And why, would she want Haman there as well ?

Esther, couldn't know:

That her hesitation, to explain,
Would save Mordecai's life.

We shouldn't be surprised, at Xerxes offer:
Of half the kingdom !

This was a well understood, figure of speech,
That we call: '**hyperbole**' ... we've met it before:
'**A deliberate exaggeration for effect**'
It was Xerxes way of showing his favour to her.

500 years later ~ the same phrase ~ **was still in use**,
Remember: when **Herod Antipas** had a birthday, &
His step-daughter danced as part of the entertainment.

Herod promised:

'I will give you whatever you ask, up to half of my kingdom'

(Mark 6. 23.)

The 1st time I heard someone preach on Esther,
They spent a lot of time, explaining the ‘old English’
But this translation, makes it much easier to understand.

So we’ll read: Ch.5. vs 9 – 14.

Notice the **contrast**, between the **relaxed, self important**
Haman ~ **bragging** about his **wealth** and **status** !

To those: who already knew about it.

Then suddenly ~ his mood changes ~ and he says:

But all this is **meaningless**

As long as I see ‘**Mordecai the Jew**’

Just sitting there at the palace gate. (5.v.13)

His wife & friends ~ being confident about **his power**.

Suggest a prompt **execution**: would resolve it.

And, get rid of his ‘**Mordecai problem**’ immediately.

From my background reading, I discovered:

The Persian gallows, was not like ours,

It was just a **single pole** !

And **Persians** didn’t use a ‘gallows’ for execution.

But to publicly display ~‘**who**’~ they’d killed.

The purpose ~ was to **shame the victim's family,**
In order: to **frighten everyone else.**

From **disobeying the king's orders.**

Mordecai didn't know it yet.

But he'd been, in much greater danger,

Than just the **Decree to kill all the Jews.**

Scheduled ~ for the following year.

However ...

God, has his own way, of dealing with such situations.

Simple, straightforward solutions.

Because:

He's never surprised ~ by what happens, or why !

Next time:

We'll find out: **how things develop,**

In the lives of:

King Xerxes, Queen Esther, Haman, & Mordecai.