

Esther Chapters 3 and 4 – John Karmelich

1. I can summarize this entire lesson in one thought: Having boldness during difficult times.
 - a) In this lesson, the main character Esther learns about a plot to wipe out all of her fellow Jewish people who live throughout the Persian Empire. Imagine having to live with a plot to kill everyone you know and care about. The classic joke here is, and you think you have troubles? Imagine what the main characters of this story, Esther and her cousin Mordecai were dealing with at this point in their lives.
 - b) Ok John, as best I can tell, no one is trying to kill me, or my family at the moment. Why should I care about any of this ancient history? The point is to understand how and why God works in our lives during difficult moments. It is about learning how God wants us to develop the boldness to be willing to make a difference for Him in our lives.
 - c) All right, you've got me curious. Let's say I am dealing with a really difficult issue at this moment in my life. What should I be doing? Of course, it starts with prayer.
 - i) Remember that the purpose of prayer is not to get our will done, but His. Since we don't usually know what is His will, it is acceptable to bring our requests to Him. The point is at the end of our prayer, we should be willing to ask God in effect, "Whatever happens, help us to accept Your will and learn whatever it is You want us to learn from this specific situation."
 - ii) OK John, then what? The point of this lesson is that God never wants us to be passive about getting involved in His plans for our lives. If one reads the early chapters of the book of Acts, the disciples prayed for boldness. (See Acts 4:23 and 4:29 as examples.) My point is there are times where God wants us to be bold enough to take a stand for Him.
 - iii) Let me try this another way: The opposite of boldness is passivity. To be passive in effect means to do nothing. God never says to us, just stand there, and watch me work. He wants us to keep moving forward and trust that He is working.
 - a) The classic example is the parting of the Red Sea. God told the Israelites to go forward and at that point He parted, the sea. The same applies to when the next generation of Israelites crossed the Jordan River. The leaders took the risk of stepping in the water, and then the river stopped flowing.
 - b) So are you saying that if I walk toward a big body of water, it will part for me? Only if it is God's will at that moment. The point is if we are willing to take a step in faith and make a difference for God, He will honor that effort and work "behind the scenes" to guide us to do what He desires.
2. Speaking of working behind the scenes, this leads me back to these two chapters in the book of Esther. In these two chapters, we start the main plot point: An effort to wipe out the entire Jewish nation. If you think Hitler was the first person to try to wipe out the Jewish nation, you don't know your history. Even the villain of this story, a man named Haman was not the first person in history to try to wipe out that nation. In this lesson, I discuss why such efforts have existed throughout history.
 - a) The important point here is simply that the heroes of the story, took risks with their own lives in order to stop this plot. That last line is a good summary of these two chapters.
 - b) Even if you know this story well, the point of this lesson is not about learning ancient history. It is about learning how and why God wants to use us to make a difference for Him in this world. It is about learning the importance of boldness in being a witness for Jesus in this world. We pray for boldness not only for ourselves, but also for our leaders and other Christians around us. The point is God wants us to be bold so that He can use us to make a difference for Him. The rest, as they say, is the details. Good examples of that boldness are in these chapters. Speaking of which, it is time to start verse 1.

3. Chapter 3 Verse 1: After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles. ²All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor.
- a) This chapter begins about five years after the time Esther became the queen as described in the previous chapter. I know this based on Verse 7, that says it is the "12th year of the king". In Chapter 2, Verse 16 the text said in effect Ester became queen in the seventh year of the king. So what happened in the time frame between Chapters 2 and Chapter 3? In effect, nothing significant relevant to the story that is about to be told.
 - i) I'm pretty sure Esther lived with all the privileges of being a queen and saw the king as he desired. I suspect she was insulated from the daily life within the city where she lived. If you are familiar with the Disney movie Aladdin, I picture her living a little like the princess from that movie in the years between these chapters.
 - b) In the meantime, the text stops focusing on our main character of the story and instead focuses on the villain of our story, a man named Haman.
 - i) Before I go any further, we should all learn a Jewish tradition here: Whenever the name of Haman is read out loud in most Jewish synagogues, it is tradition to boo Haman. OK, let's all give a shot: Haman? Boo. Ok, back to the story.
 - ii) In running the Persian Empire, if you recall from Chapter 1, it was divided up into 127 separate territories. History records there were leaders over each territory and there were top guys over bigger territories. If you also recall from Chapter 1, there were also seven "wise men" who were in charge of giving the king advice.
 - iii) Apparently, above all of these people the king placed Haman (boo ☺, ok I'll stop now) above all of these top advisors. The closest English language equivalent might be a prime minister under a king. Think of it as a second in command. For a biblical example, think of Joseph when he was the #2 man in all of Egypt.
 - c) OK onto Verse 2. Because Haman was now the number two man in power, everybody who saw him was required to bow down and give him honor.
 - i) The only person who refused to do this was our hero Mordecai.
 - ii) Before I go any further, I need to discuss Haman's full name. Verse 1 states his name as Haman, son of Hammedatha, the Agagite. OK, why is that there? To answer, we need to read from First Samuel Chapter 15. The king of Israel at that time was Saul. He was commanded by God to kill everyone in a group of people called the Amalakites. The leader of this group was a man named Agag. Know that this event happened centuries before the story of Esther.
 - a) Back in 1st Samuel, Saul failed to kill the king of the Amalakites. The main Israelite prophet at that time was Samuel, who that book is named after. The point is Samuel had to kill Agag himself because Saul didn't obey.
 - b) So what does any of this have to do with the story of Esther? The answer is that our villain Haman, was a descendant of Agag. To be an Agagite just means one is a descendant of Agag. The point is simply that Haman was a descendant of this man and was among the people that Saul never killed when he was ordered to wipe out all the Amalakites.
 - c) It may also be helpful to remember here that Mordecai was a relative of King Saul, as I discussed back in Chapter 1. It is almost as if Mordecai was told when he was young, remember how King Saul, who was part of our family lost his kingdom because he failed to be obedient to God. The lesson of that family legend was simply to be obedient to God in what He calls us to do. That is why we study our bible, to learn how God expects us to live out our lives. Saul failed to do that and the descendants of that family were most likely taught in effect, "don't be like great Uncle Saul".

- d) If I have lost you here, just remember that the hero here in the book of Esther is a man named Mordecai who was a relative of an old Jewish king named Saul. The villain of the story is a descendant of a group of people that Saul was ordered to (and failed to) kill.
- i) Before we move on, let me talk about why God ordered Saul to kill these people.
 - ii) To answer that, we have to go way back to the time of Moses. When the Israelites left Egypt, the Amalakitites attacked them. In effect, this is all about God's promise to Abraham back in Genesis 12:3 that said, "I will bless those that bless you and curse those that curse you". Because the Amalekites attacked the Israelites, they have always been on God's "cursed list". In fact, in Genesis 17:16, it says that the Lord (God) will have war with the Amalekites from "generation to generation".
 - iii) With all of that said, think of that war between the Amalekites and the Israelites continuing here in the story of Esther between Mordecai and Haman. Now you understand why Haman is booed when his name is read out loud in synagogues.
- e) OK John, I am not an Israelite living thousands of years ago. Tell me why I should care that the Israelites consider their mortal enemy to be the Amalekites?
- i) Symbolically speaking, this group is a model of our life without God. It is to say that there are influences in this world that want nothing to do with the God of the bible. Think of people who go out of their way to attack belief in God and attack anyone who puts their trust in the God of the bible. OK, John, we all know such people exist. Why do we have to have war with them? Why can't we just believe what we believe and they believe what they believe? The issue is when Christians and religious Jews get attacked for believing what we believe.
 - a) Jesus once said, "Upon this rock (i.e., belief that He is the son of God) He will build His church and the gates of Hades (hell) will not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18, NIV). That statement by Jesus is a little strange in that gates are not offensive weapons. Think of this situation as describing the people who ignore God not wanting to let believers in their world. Yet, the gates of that world are not strong enough to stop the influence of believers.
 - ii) OK John, and what does this have to do with our story here in Esther? The reason God orders war against the Amalekites all through the Old Testament is not that He only loves group "x" and hates group "y". The point is we believe in a God that knows all things. Therefore, He must know who chooses to live for Him and who chooses to ignore Him through one's lifetime. If this group called the Amalekites represent those who willfully choose to fight against the God all of their lives, we must accept that His over time will prevail against the will of His opposition.
 - a) The story in Esther is just one example of such.
- f) OK, after a page and half of background, it is time to come back to Mordecai. He refused to bow down to honor Haman. I don't believe the issue is that Mordecai refused to accept that Haman was now the #2 man in the Empire. I believe Mordecai wouldn't bow to this man because Haman was an enemy of God's people.
- i) A couple more quick thoughts here and we're ready for Verse 3. I believe that Mordecai had grown in his faith in God. In Chapter 1, Mordecai told Esther not to tell anyone she was Jewish. Here we are, years later in Chapter 3. Mordecai is in effect making it known to everyone he is Jewish based on his refusal to bow down to Haman when he past by.
 - a) Don't forget that Mordecai was now a "big shot" in the city of Susa. Think of Mordecai as a city official. Think of Haman as far more powerful than Mordecai as Haman was the number two man in the entire empire.
 - b) Also notice how Mordecai didn't think, "those rules about Amalekites only applied to Moses or to the times when my great uncle Saul was king. Now that I'm living in Persia I can ignore what God commands of the Israelites."

4. Verse 3: Then the royal officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's command?"⁴ Day after day they spoke to him but he refused to comply. Therefore they told Haman about it to see whether Mordecai's behavior would be tolerated, for he had told them he was a Jew.
- a) It's time to talk for a moment about Mordecai's job again as a "gate official". My point is that Mordecai did not have this job by himself. He was one of a number of people who were in charge of deciding who could and who could not enter this city.
 - b) If you also recall from the end of Chapter 2, that chapter ended with Mordecai stopping a plot to kill the king. As I said, it has been about five years between the time of Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. We don't read of Mordecai getting any great reward for his good deed. All we read of so far is an enemy of the Jewish people rising to be the #2 man in power.
 - i) To explain how this is relevant to our lives, we may not understand why we don't get any rewards in our lives for our good deeds. We may wonder why a person who appears to not care about God gets to rise to great power. The point for us to remember is no matter how bad things may seem at any given moment, we have to remember that "God has a plan" for our lives and He is still working out that plan on His timing.
 - c) Meanwhile, back at the city gate, the other officials who worked with Mordecai asked him in effect, "why don't you bow down to Haman like everyone else? After all, you could get all of us killed or at the least, get us fired for not showing proper respect to Haman." The other men sitting at the gate probably said, "After all, everyone else is bowing down to Haman? Why make such a big deal about it? None of us really like the guy that much, but we want to protect our jobs and our lives and therefore we do it."
 - i) A bible student can't read this and not think about the story in the book of Daniel, when his three buddies refused to bow down to a giant statue that the king of the Babylonian empire (Nebuchadnezzar) had made. (See Daniel Chapter 3.)
 - a) In both cases, the issue is that of a Jewish person refusing to honor those who God does not honor. So if a Jewish person today doesn't like their leader, do they not bow down today? No the issue is about when such leaders claim to be "gods" or is a biblically named enemy.
 - ii) An interesting plot point here is that Mordecai had told the other people who worked the city gate that he was Jewish. (See the last part of Verse 4). Remember that this is the same man who told Esther to keep quiet about being Jewish. So why did Mordecai tell the others about his background? Was it out of boredom, or just to explain his actions? Did he tell the other men the whole history between the family of Haman and his own history? I suspect that is the case. I suspect that Mordecai had time to kill with the other city leaders and told them the truth.
 - iii) OK John, why should I care about any of this stuff? What I suspect is happening is that Mordecai is growing in his faith in God. Remember again that it has been 4-5 years since Esther has been made queen. I picture Mordecai thinking, I might as well say the truth. If I die, I die. What about Esther? What if word gets back to the king that Esther is Jewish?
 - a) My point is when one first becomes a believer, one is often scared to share one's faith with say, one's immediate family or friends. As one grows in one's faith, one often becomes more bold to express that faith. That may be the case of what Mordecai did by disclosing his background. Either that, or it could have been just out of boredom. ☺
 - iv) Whatever the reason, we have a key plot point here. Because Mordecai disclosed to the others at the gate that he was Jewish, word is going to get back to Haman that Mordecai was Jewish. It reminds me of the expression, "The fastest way to spread a secret is to only tell it to one person. Word then gets around fast."

5. Verse 5: When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. ⁶ Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.
- a) Like I said, Haman found out about Mordecai's Jewish background. Remember that Haman was the number two man in the empire after the king. This is a man who could have anything he wanted, yet it bothered him to no end that one man refused to bow down to him. Also consider the fact that Haman didn't know about Mordecai's specific background as a relative of King Saul. All Haman knew was that Mordecai was Jewish.
 - b) Now we come to the key plot point in the story. Haman didn't want to just kill Mordecai for this action, but all of the Jewish people. What we have here is Haman considering his family background and the fact that the Jewish people tried to wipe out everyone in his family. Haman thought, "I am the second most powerful person in this empire. It is time for me to use that power to take revenge upon my enemy and my family's enemies. I have the power and the means to destroy this group once and for all, and I will do it".
 - c) OK John, we all know that Haman failed to kill the Jewish people. Even if we don't know the rest of the book of Esther, we do know that Jewish people are alive today, therefore, he must have failed at this effort to wipe them all out. Why should we care?
 - i) To explain this, first I need to remind all of us of an old Christian expression: "The biggest mistake the Jewish people make is they fail to see Jesus as their promised Messiah that has come into the world. The biggest mistake that many Christians make is they fail to see Jesus as the God of the Jewish people."
 - ii) Let me put this another way: God made an unconditional promise in Genesis that the land of Israel would always belong to Abraham's descendants, which is, the Jewish people. (See Genesis 12:6). That promise was not conditional upon their acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah. As I like to joke, God did not say to Abraham, "I will give this land to your descendants, unless you reject the Messiah, and then you are toast". Our bible does not say that. The point being that God's promise to give the land to the Jewish people is not a conditional promise.
 - iii) OK John, so what? The point is Satan understood that was part of God's plan. To understand Satan, one must understand that He believes God exists, but in effect he does not believe people are worth saving. Therefore he is doing all he can to stop God's redemptive plan from happening. One way to stop God's plans would be wipe out the Jewish nation from existing.
 - a) In the Old Testament, that would stop their Messiah (Jesus) from coming in the world. If no Jewish nation exists, the promised Messiah cannot be born through that nation. Therefore, Satan is making every effort to wipe out that nation before Jesus can come into the world. We are reading of one of those efforts here in the story of Esther.
 - b) Coming back to these verses in Esther, notice Haman wanted to wipe out all Jewish people, (men, women and babies) throughout the Persian world. Although Satan is not mentioned by name, it appears he is behind Haman's plot to destroy the Jewish nation. If the goal is to prevent the Messiah to come in the world, one way to do it is to kill all the Jewish people.
 - iv) Jesus came into the world 2,000 years ago. Obviously this plot failed. How does this affect the world today? Remember that God made the unconditional promise to give the land of Israel to the Jewish people. Israel exists today. If Satan can wipe out that nation today, then he has negated God's promise to them to them. Who do you think is behind the effort to wipe out the nation of Israel today? As we'll read later in this lesson, the plot to destroy the Jewish people bears upon events that have occurred just in the last 100 years. Meanwhile, back to the story.

6. Verse 7: In the twelfth year of King Xerxes, in the first month, the month of Nisan, they cast the *pur* (that is, the lot) in the presence of Haman to select a day and month. And the lot fell on the twelfth month, the month of Adar.
- a) To understand this verse, one has to understand that Haman and the Persian people believed in multiple gods. (This is many centuries before Islam dominated the region.) They believed in effect the gods controlled the fate of the world and one could figure out the will of the gods by "casting lots". A rough equivalent would be for us to keep rolling some dice over and over again. Let's say we roll two dice over and over again, and it kept coming up twelve. The logical conclusion would be either that the dice were bad or that some force is making the dice keep coming up twelve. Even though "the lot" is not dice, like we think of them, the principal is the same: Haman is looking for a sign from his gods when he should carry out his plans to wipe out the Jewish people. In other words, Haman never questioned whether or not he should even carry out this plan. He was just checking with his gods as to when this event should happen.
 - b) Let me talk for a moment about the Jewish calendar. Haman started casting lots in the month of Nisan. This is roughly the month of March. The Jewish calendar is based on a lunar cycle and it is not the modern month system. I visualize Haman casting lots and saying in effect, "Shall I kill them this month?" The lots (think dice for a visual picture) had no pattern, but just came back in random numbers. Haman then kept trying this system picking different days and months. Finally a pattern emerges where the month to carry out this plan falls in the Jewish month of "Adar".
 - i) Know that the Persian Empire has a different name for months than the Jewish people. However, the Persians did use a lunar cycle for to describe a month, so the writer of Esther was using the Jewish names for months so that the Jewish audience reading this story would know when this event occurred.
 - ii) In summary, the "dice" came up almost a year later. It would be like saying, we started casting dice for this plan in March, and the dice came up "February". Therefore, Haman needed to wait a whole year before "D-Day" to execute the plan. In the meantime, Haman had to get the word out throughout the entire Persian Empire to wipe out all the Jewish people on this date. Also remember that Haman had to get this plan approved by the king, which is the next part of the story.
7. Verse 8: Then Haman said to King Xerxes, "There is a certain people dispersed and scattered among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom whose customs are different from those of all other people and who do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them. ⁹ If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will put ten thousand talents of silver into the royal treasury for the men who carry out this business."
- a) Here is what Haman said to the king. There is a group of people throughout the Empire who do not obey the king's laws. It is best that we destroy these people. King Xeres, if you let me carry out this plan, I will provide for you 10,000 talents of silver.
 - b) It might help this point to explain a little about "10,000 talents of silver". In that empire they didn't have paper money as we have today. They did issue coins for currency and those coins were made of silver. Therefore, silver carried a lot of value in this empire. A "talent" is about 75 pounds. This is about 12 million ounces of silver. I just checked the market price for silver, and an ounce is currently going for \$28 per ounce. Therefore, the total amount that Haman promised the king in today's dollars is \$336 million dollars.
 - i) Maybe that is why the king didn't ask any questions about Haman's plans. Maybe he just saw the "dollar signs" and figured that's a good enough reason to carry out this plan. Also remember that the Persian Empire was still recovering from the bad war loss to the Greeks. Therefore, their treasury and earnings was most likely, way down at this point in time and the money was appealing to the king.

- c) So where would Haman get this money? From the Jews he would kill. It shows that the Jewish people were prosperous within the Persian Empire. This comes back to another promise made to the Jewish people by God. He promised prosperity to the Jewish people while they were in captivity (See Jeremiah 29:7 as an example). The point is Haman knew that the Jewish people as a rule of thumb were prosperous. They have now been living in captivity for a hundred years. No wonder most of the Jewish people living at that time choose not to go back to Israel when the captivity was officially over (prior to the time when the book of Esther takes place.) Somehow Haman made an estimate of the wealth of the Jewish people and came up with the 10,000 talent of silver estimate.
 - d) Before I say anything else, notice what is not mentioned in these verses: Any references to the Jewish people. Haman just said there is "this group". King Xerxes never ask who this group was. The king never even inquired how they were rebellious as Haman is claiming in these verses. Again, I suspect the king was excited about getting all of that money. It is also probable that the king may have just wanted to stop any threat to his kingdom. No matter the reason, Xerxes in effect gave Haman a blank check and said, "Do this plan".
8. Verse 10: So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews.
- a) To explain this, first I need to explain the significance of a signet ring. Think of it as a unique device for stamping a document. It is sort of like a unique signature. The point is when an order is given by a king, the way everyone knew the order is genuine was based on that unique stamp (again, like a unique signature). That is what this ring is for.
 - b) The next thing to notice is Haman's "full name" is listed again. The writer of Esther is pointing out again that Haman comes from this background as an enemy of the Jewish people. If we already know this, why state it here again? For the same reason Verse 10 states that Haman is an "enemy of the Jews". It is a reminder that God allows Satan's plans against His chosen people to temporarily succeed for a period time, so that God Himself can use His people to overcome these plans.
 - c) Let me explain this a different way: Satan is well aware of God's unconditional promises to not only Christians but to the Jewish people. So why does he try to stop these plans?
 - i) It is because Satan himself doesn't like God's redemptive plan for people. In effect Satan wants to be worshipped as God. (See Isaiah 14:13). Satan believes that if he can stop God's redemptive plan from happening, in effect he wins. That is why he makes every effort to stop God's unconditional promises from happening.
 - ii) In other words, if Satan can stop God's unconditional promise to give the land of Israel to the Jewish people and prevent the promised Messiah from coming into the world, there would be no redemption possible for people. Then Satan could be worshipped without any competition from God Himself. That is why life as we know it is a "chess game" between God and Satan as I stated in the first lesson. Think of people as both the pawns and the prizes in this chess game. We are the pawns in that both God and Satan use people to get their will done. We are also the prizes in that God is trying to collect us to spend eternity with Him forever.
 - iii) By the way, this does not mean God and Satan are equals. It just means that Satan was a powerful entity created by God (See Ezekiel 28:15) in order for Him to show the world that no powerful entity created by Him has the power to overcome Him.
 - d) OK, and what does all of this theology have to do with our story here in Esther? It is to understand that any and all attempts to wipe out the Jewish people is "biblical" in that the underlying purpose of such a plan is to prevent God's promises from coming true.
 - e) For Christians, it means that God desires we become "Pro-Jewish", not because Jewish people are saved today just because they are Jewish. It is about our trust that God will keep His promise to that nation that they will always exist (until Jesus' returns) and have a homeland when Jesus does return. Meanwhile, back to Haman.

9. Verse 11: "Keep the money," the king said to Haman, "and do with the people as you please."
- a) OK John, if the king needed the money, why would the king tell Haman to keep the money and do with the (Jewish) people as he pleases? Is it blind trust in Haman?
 - i) One reason is for us to see Satan working behind the scenes to manipulate history the way he desired it to happen. It is as if a demonic force is telling the king to say to Haman, "I like this plan and go forward with it."
 - ii) I sense boredom by the king with the day-to-day operations of his job. Maybe that is why he promoted Haman to be second in command. That way someone else could be in charge of daily aspects of running the empire. It is as if the king is saying, "If there is a problem within the Empire with a certain group of people, I don't want to know any more details. I'll take your word for it, and you deal with it, and you personally can collect any financial reward for dealing with this issue."
 - iii) When the king said "keep the money", I suspect it just means to use it for the royal treasury and I don't want any of it for myself, but who knows for sure.
 - b) So is the king simply not interested in the future death of a large group of people, which includes women and children? That is why I suspect he was bored with the daily aspects of being the king. Whatever the reason, the king took a hands off approach to this issue.
10. Verse 12: Then on the thirteenth day of the first month the royal secretaries were summoned. They wrote out in the script of each province and in the language of each people all Haman's orders to the king's satraps, the governors of the various provinces and the nobles of the various peoples. These were written in the name of King Xerxes himself and sealed with his own ring.¹³ Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews--young and old, women and little children--on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods.¹⁴ A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so they would be ready for that day.
- a) Here is the actual order written by Haman to wipe out the Jewish nation. Some facts:
 - i) The order was given on the 13th day of the first month. In a lunar cycle, this is the first month of spring and the month when Jews celebrate Passover. Since Passover is celebrated the 14th day of the month, this is the day before that holiday.
 - ii) The order had to be translated and delivered into probably dozens of languages that existed in the vast realm of the Persian Empire. Remember that this empire stretched from Egypt to India.
 - iii) The actual day the Jews were to be attacked was almost a year later. The month of Adar was the last month of the year. In other words, the Jewish people had almost a year to wait before this day and everyone else had a year to prepare.
 - iv) The order specifically mentioned that all the Jews were to be killed, no matter what was their age or whether or not they were children.
 - v) Because Haman possessed the king's seal, the order was official. Remember that in Persian law, once an order is given, it cannot be repealed.
 - vi) I pondered, who is to carry out the attack? Either the soldiers of the empire or in effect it could be anyone who is not Jewish is welcome to physically attack them.
 - b) It is amazing to consider all of this happened simply because Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman when he passed by. It makes me wonder if Mordecai regretted that he refused to bow down and thought, "If I was just willing to compromise on this one issue, maybe God would have spared all of his people." The good news is that even if Mordecai did have that thought, we learn in the next chapter that he had faith God would rescue the Jewish nation somehow and that this event wouldn't happen.
 - i) By the way, if you see the similarity between this event and how Hitler tried to eliminate all the Jewish people during World War II, there is a connection and I'll talk about that connection in a later lesson on Esther.

11. Verse 15: Spurred on by the king's command, the couriers went out, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered.
- a) That means not everyone willfully accepted this order. The City of Susa pondered it.
12. Chapter 4, Verse 1: When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. ² But he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. ³ In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes.
- a) The edict to kill all the Jews at this point had now reached throughout the empire. These verses talk about how there was a lot of crying, weeping and fasting that Jewish people did, knowing that their lives were about to come to an end. Remember that these are Jewish people who didn't live in Israel but were scattered around the empire. Notice that all of them now have their focus on God. It is an indication of how far God has to go in order to get the attention of those who are called to salvation.
- i) I'm sure everyone in this group was asking God why they had to suffer for this. After all, none of them knew anything about Haman. They did not know that he was an Amalakite that wanted revenge on the Jewish people. All that was known is that the king issued an irrevocable order that roughly a year from now, all the Jewish people would be killed.
- ii) This leads me back to my opening comments about dealing with tragedies. We don't know why God allows certain things to happen. All we can do is learn to trust Him through issues. While all the Jewish people were weeping and fasting their way through this tragedy, God Himself was working on a plan.
- b) Meanwhile, back in the capital city of Susa, things were no better for the main characters. Mordecai went to work in "sackcloth". For those who don't know, this is a traditional sign of mourning. This is an uncomfortable garment one wears as a sign of grief. The closest equivalent we have is when we wear black clothing at a funeral.
- c) Apparently there is a law in Persia that no one was allowed to enter the city wearing this type of garment. I suspect that law was enacted for the following reason: If someone is grieving over the loss of say, a relative, that person would be no good to anyone else and therefore such a person should not be doing business in the capital city. Whether or not this is a good rule is debatable. The point is, it is on the books, "like it or not".
- i) Therefore, Mordecai was "technically" breaking this rule by sitting at the entrance to the city although he didn't actually enter the city. The related point is anyone entering or leaving the city would see this high official (Mordecai) mourning.
- ii) In a way, this is a way to get word around Susa about what is happening. It could also get Mordecai killed for doing this act, but he probably figured, "I'm going to die anyway, I might as well make it known publicly that I am Jewish."
- iii) With that said, it is time to check in on Esther back at the palace: ☺
13. Verse 4: When Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. ⁵ Then Esther summoned Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why.
- a) Apparently Esther was isolated from this news. As I mentioned earlier, I picture Esther being a little like the princess from the Disney movie "Aladdin" where she was isolated from the daily affairs of the kingdom. In other words, the job of the queen was to be at the disposal of the king and she didn't know about local politics.
- b) With that said, one of Esther's servants did see Mordecai at the gate wearing his sackcloth and reported this back to Esther. Notice that Esther's servants knew who Mordecai was and his relationship with the queen. The point is as Mordecai was publicly risking his life by wearing sackcloth in public. That fact got Esther aware that something was up.

14. Verse 6: So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate.⁷ Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews.⁸ He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to urge her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.
- a) In Verses 5 and 6, we get introduced to a minor character named "Hatach". Apparently he was one of the king's personal servants and a eunuch. This man was personally assigned to serve Esther. Since he was a eunuch, the king didn't have to worry about this man doing anything wrong with Esther. He was the "go to guy" between Mordecai and Esther.
 - b) Therefore, Esther sends Hatach out to Mordecai to see what is the matter. Maybe because of who Esther was, or maybe because of the way Mordecai was dressed, Esther did not want to risk seeing Mordecai personally. So she sends this servant out to find out what was going on. Back in Verse 4, Esther brought some clothing for Mordecai and as the queen was saying to him in effect, "Don't get yourself killed by disobeying the king's order not to dress this way." Here, put on these respectable clothes. Mordecai's response to Esther was in effect, "Thanks, but no thanks. I'll continue to wear, what I am wearing. Now let me tell you (the servant) so that you can tell Esther why I am dressed this way".
 - i) Mordecai then went on to explain all of the details of this edict. In fact, Mordecai now believed that Esther had become the queen for the opportunity of helping out the Jewish people. She now had the power to do something about this edict.
 - ii) Mordecai also understood that the queen could not just walk up to the king and say, "please resend this order". First of all, in Persia, a queen could not just see the king unless she was summoned. Second laws in Persia are not revocable. As a top city official, Mordecai knew all of this, but he is still begging Esther (through this servant) to make an effort to work past those issues and beg the king for the lives of the Jewish people.
 - c) Let me pause for a moment and ask, "What if I already know this story? Why should I think about these details here?" The point is not to understand ancient history. The point is to understand at times of tragedies, God is still willing to work through us to guide us through these times and help us deal with them. Mordecai took a risk by wearing that outfit publicly. He figured he had nothing to lose at this point. Further, he was begging Esther to risk her life for the sake of her people as well as for Mordecai himself.
 - i) The point for us during difficult times is God does not expect us to just sit there and say, "Well, if it is God's will, I have to accept it." He expects us to do what we can when we can and take risks in order to make situations work out.
 - ii) Meanwhile, back to the city of Susa:
15. Verse 9: Hathach went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said.¹⁰ Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai,¹¹ "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that he be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold scepter to him and spare his life. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king."
- a) Remember at this point in the story, Esther did not know about the edict to wipe out the Jewish people. However she did know about Persian law in that she was not allowed to see the king unless he personally called her to him. It was a death sentence to see the king without being summoned. Esther is in effect asking Mordecai through this servant, what can I do since the king has not called me to see him lately?
 - b) The text also mentions the fact that it has been 30 days since the king called her. That might be a sign the king was getting bored with her. Let's face it. This is a king who had lots of women. As beautiful as she may be, this king was a "player" of women.

16. Verse 12: When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, ¹³ he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. ¹⁴ For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"
- a) Let me paraphrase Mordecai's message to Esther: "Just because no one knows you are Jewish in the palace, don't think that you will escape this judgment. If you don't make the effort to do something, God will allow some other way for the Jewish people to survive as a nation. After all, God did make an unconditional promise that the Messiah would come through our nation. Therefore, I know this plan of our enemy will not completely succeed simply because I believe His words to be true. However, Esther, this event may be why God allowed you to be the queen of this empire. If you don't do something, He will work another way, but this is your chance to make a difference for Him."
 - i) Notice that Mordecai is appealing to Jewish heritage. He is saying, "I know I told you to hide your identity. Now I am telling you, it is time for that secret to come to an end. Yes, you may be killed for approaching the king. However, you need to ask yourself at this moment, "What is more important, my own life, or the life of your people?" Mordecai is asking her to make a difference for God right now.
 - ii) The point for us is when difficult times come, we have to be willing to take a risk. Usually we don't know why God elevates us to certain positions or places in life until key moments like this come. Then we have to ask ourselves, are we willing to take a stand for God, even it is a risk for our own lives or own well being? That is the type of issue that Esther had to face at this moment.
17. Verse 15: Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: ¹⁶ "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."
- a) Remember that Mordecai raised Esther, and therefore, she sees him as a father figure. I don't know of many grown daughters who can refuse a good father's request like this.
 - b) Esther's first response is to get all of the Jewish people living in the city of Susa to not eat or drink for three days. Esther states she will also command her servants to do the same. She also says she will not eat or drink herself. Notice Esther knew enough about God to realize that fasting is a form of prayer to God in order for her efforts to be successful.
 - c) This leads me to a quick discussion of the issue of fasting: Can we get God to act a certain way based on whether or not we fast? Can God be manipulated based on fasting? My view is that if God is perfect, He knows all things, and He cannot be manipulated based on either prayer or fasting. If that is the case, why bother with this exercise? Other than making everyone hungry and thirsty for three days, what good does it do?
 - i) Remember that a major purpose of prayer is to get our will aligned with God's will. Prayer is not about our will getting done, but His will. Prayer is a way of saying to God, "I care about this issue. I know You care about me and I know that You want Your will done in this world. Therefore, give me the courage and the boldness to do Your will, no matter what the consequences".
 - ii) OK, but what about fasting as opposed to that 30 second prayer? Fasting is a way of showing God that one is serious about getting His will done. To skip a meal or not eat for a time being for prayer is a way of saying, "I care more about Your will being done here than I care about food or drink at this moment in time." It is to pray, "Dear God, I really want Your will to be done. I want to prove to You that I am serious about my prayer. Therefore, I wont eat or drink for this time frame."
 - iii) So are Christians required to fast? No. However at times, it is a way of showing God one's commitment to getting His will done. OK then, back to Esther. ☺

- d) In effect, the whole purpose of having all the Jewish people in Susa fast was to give Esther the boldness to approach the king, even though she may be killed just for taking that risk.
- i) Notice that Esther believes in the power of prayer and fasting. She believes that if people are praying on her behalf, that act will give her the courage to do this task that could potentially cost her, her life.
 - ii) So does that mean if we want to do something bold for God, we have to get others to pray and fast on our behalf? Have to? No. Should? Yes. As I have said many times, I am convinced it is the prayers of others that makes this writing ministry work. Asking others to pray for you reminds you that people are asking God to make a difference through our own lives. It inspires us to not let them down.
 - iii) Remember the goal here is all about God's will getting done and not ours. The worst that can happen here in Susa is that Jewish people and Esther's staff go hungry for a few days. The edict to kill the Jews would still be in place. However, if Esther is successful in stopping this plot, she should now give the glory to God for giving her the power and the courage to use her to make that difference. She can then thank her staff and the Jewish residences of Susa for praying and fasting on her behalf to make a difference.
 - iv) Let me apply this to our lives another way. We may not be in a position to be a queen of the Persian Empire in order to make a difference for God. However, we can pray and fast on behalf of others who are in a position to make a difference for our world. Know that if nothing else, God calls on us to pray and maybe even fast for our leaders. We can and should make a difference in the world, by praying that God work in the lives of those in charge so that His will can be done.
 - v) While this whole lesson was being written, God has laid it on me to pray about a much smaller situation going on in my own life. I just got an email from someone I barely knew who was helping me with a work related situation. My point is if God can help me out that way, think what He can and will do for you if you are willing to trust in Him to work through your life to get His will done.
 - vi) Oh, and we have one more verse to go:
18. Verse 17: So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions.
- a) Translation: Mordecai agreed with the queen's plans. Mordecai was probably very proud of how the girl he raised turned out at this moment in time. He had no idea whether or not Esther would succeed. All he knew was that Esther was trying to do something on behalf of her people. As worried as I would be in this situation, if that was my daughter, I would be proud that she was willing to take a stand for God at this moment in her life.
 - b) As the plot thickens, we'll wait until the next lesson to see what happens next.
 - c) In the meantime, it is time to pray for a little boldness to deal with the problems in our own lives. Let us ask God that His will be done as we live to make a difference for Him.
19. Heavenly Father, give us the boldness to make a difference for You in this world. Help us to know how to pray and even fast for those who are our leaders so that they can make a difference for You in this world. We don't know what our future will be like. We just know that You are in charge and You know what will happen to us in our future. Help us to take comfort in the fact that You know all things and are working out our lives and our world for Your glory. Give us discernment for You will, as we use our time to make a difference for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.