

# BUILD-A-BELIEVER WORKSHOPS

## Ezra Nehemiah Esther

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*People say to me, "How do you build a church?" You don't build a church, you build a believer. As a result, the church will build itself. (John MacArthur).*

### Esther

#### Chapter Three

#### *"Bow Outed"*

#### Introduction

Mordecai and Esther were closet-Jews:

1. Mordecai had not revealed his Jewish heritage
2. He had **charged** Esther to not reveal **her family and her people**.

It was a successful strategy for them – at least from a worldly point of view:

1. Esther had been chosen queen of Persia from a pool of perhaps thousands of contestants.
2. Mordecai was now a magistrate, sitting in the gates and making important legal decisions.

*- being changed to bring change -*

Then something happened. Haman was promoted to a high position in the kingdom of Persia. He demanded everyone bow down before him. There was something about Haman, and about this demand to bow down, that rankled Mordecai as a Jew. He couldn't bring himself to bow down.

When asked about his refusal by the other officials, he came out of the closet. He was outed as a Jew. Hence he was "bow outed." Get it?

You are probably not a closet-Christian. We live in relative freedom to worship Jesus as we please. No one is openly demanding we bow down before them.

Behind the scenes, however, there is someone who wants to see you bow before him. It's our adversary, the devil.

1. He confronted our Lord in the desert, offering Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if He would only bow down and worship him.
2. In the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the devil possesses the antichrist and demands that the entire population of the planet worship him.

Those are dramatic historic moments. The pressure on you to bow is more subtle; and thus far more sinister:

1. It's the pressure to conceal your zeal for the Lord so you can fit-in at home or at work or in the world.
2. It's the pressure to compromise your views and your values and go along with things that are wrong.
3. It's the pressure to covet the things in the world and put them ahead of your love for Jesus.

Those and many other possible scenarios are attempts to get you to bow down. God allows them – just as He did with Mordecai – to strengthen you to stand.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Don't Be Pressured To Bow, and #2 Don't Be Perplexed While Standing.

#### #1 Don't Be Pressured To Bow (2:19-3:4)

Mordecai and Esther were blowing it. It was not a crime to be a Jew in Persia. They concealed their Jewish heritage as a compromise so they could get ahead. There were things they coveted. For Esther, it was being queen. For Mordecai, it was promotion; and he got one. We read about it at the end of chapter two.

[Esther 2:19](#) When virgins were gathered together a second time, Mordecai sat within the king's gate.

[Virgins](#) had been gathered from all over the kingdom in order to choose one of them to be queen. Esther had been chosen. We don't

know why there was a second search. The best explanation seems to be that King Ahasuerus wanted to add to his harem of concubines; and this idea of having young ladies compete was rather appealing to him.

Ladies, would you rather be queen of Persia with Ahasuerus as your king and husband; or live a quiet life in love with a husband who loved you and loved the Lord? Esther's life was very sad, if you ask me.

Mordecai now **sat within the king's gate**. The words mean he was promoted to a position of magistrate. He was one of the men who sat in judgment over legal matters that were brought to the king.

Esther 2:20 Now Esther had not revealed her family and her people, just as Mordecai had charged her, for Esther obeyed the command of Mordecai as when she was brought up by him.

Esther was old enough to take her own stand for God. Both of them continued to conceal their heritage. It seemed to be working for them; but you and I know there was an emptiness in their hearts.

Esther 2:21 In those days, while Mordecai sat within the king's gate, two of the king's eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, doorkeepers, became furious and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus.

Esther 2:22 So the matter became known to Mordecai, who told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name.

Esther 2:23 And when an inquiry was made into the matter, it was confirmed, and both were hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.

Mordecai overheard a plot against Ahasuerus. It led to the arrest, conviction, and execution of the conspirators. It was duly noted in the official records. We need to make a mental note of this because it is going to play a crucial role later on in our story.

For now, notice that Mordecai received no recognition for his deed. But, even if he had received recognition, so what? Isn't it infinitely better to live in such a way that your recognition comes from God? Isn't it His **"Well done, My good and faithful servant,"** that you want to hear?

Chapter three begins with a contrast. Mordecai was not recognized and rewarded for his good deed... But Haman was recognized and rewarded, though he was an evil man.

Esther 3:1 After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him.

Haman was an **Agagite**, which could mean he came from a district in the empire known as Agag. But it could also mean that he was descended from Agag, king of the Amalekites. If so, then we can easily understand why Haman hated the Jews: God had declared war on the Amalekites and wanted their name and memory blotted off the face of the earth.

The story goes back to the time of Israel's Exodus from Egypt, when the Amalekites attacked God's weary people in the rear ranks of the marching nation. After Moses commanded Joshua to fight against Amalek, he interceded on the mountain, and Joshua won a great victory.

It was Saul, the first king of Israel, whom God commanded to destroy the Amalekites. He failed in his commission and lost his own crown. Because Saul didn't fully obey the Lord, some Amalekites lived; and one of their descendants, Haman, determined to annihilate his people's ancient enemy, the Jews.

Esther 3:2 And all the king's servants who were within the king's gate bowed and paid homage to Haman, for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai would not bow or pay homage.

We don't really know why Mordecai refused to bow to Haman. It wasn't wrong for Jews to bow before officials, or even to one another, as long as there was no worship involved. There was something about Haman, or his command, that drew a line in the sand which Mordecai would not cross.

Esther 3:3 Then the king's servants who were within the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you transgress the king's command?"

Esther 3:4 Now it happened, when they spoke to him daily and he would not listen to them, that they told it to Haman, to see whether Mordecai's words would stand; for Mordecai had told them that he was a Jew.

He was outed by his refusal to bow. He refused to succumb to the pressure to bow.

You and I are constantly pressured to bow down. It's what Satan has always wanted. The question for us is: Where do we draw our line? We saw last week in our study that another of Satan's strategies is to desensitize us to sin. It's a deadly combination: Desensitized, then pressured to bow down.

How can we resist the pressure and refuse to bow? A large part of the struggle is recognizing the strategy against you – admitting you are being pressured. Not only pressured, but pressured to bow down as if you were denying the Lord and worshipping someone or something else. Then there are a few practical considerations:

1. First, don't conceal your relationship with Jesus.
2. Second, Beware of compromising with the world and its views and values.
3. Third, don't covet the things of the world. Promotion and power and possessions and immoral pleasures can be cancelled out by a sincere passion for the things of God.

If you refuse to bow, you remain standing, and you can expect retaliation.

## #2 Don't Be Perplexed While Standing (3:5-15)

A person standing for God is a target that God's enemies wants to cut-down.

Esther 3:5 When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow or pay him homage, Haman was filled with wrath.

Esther 3:6 But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him of the people of Mordecai. Instead, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus - the people of Mordecai.

You cannot understand human history unless you read the Bible from cover-to-cover and realize that there is a spiritual conflict in our universe. Much of the tension between God and Satan centers on

God's plan for the nation of Israel. Haman was a Hitler – just as others before him and others after him.

We don't have time to develop it, but many commentators see Haman as a type of the antichrist in the end times; and Mordecai a type of the Jews who God miraculously preserves during the last half of the Great Tribulation.

Haman hatched a plan to exterminate the Jews:

Esther 3:7 In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, the lot), before Haman to determine the day and the month, until *it fell on the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar.*

Haman consulted the wise men of Persia, who were occultic astrologers and sorcerers. In order to determine the best date to exterminate the Jews, they threw a die, called **Pur**, onto calendars. They thus determined first the month; then the date of the month; that this plan would have the support of the zodiac. By the way: Does that make Haman the first Zodiac Killer?

As I should remind you each study in Esther, the doctrine behind this book is that of the Providence of God. The Jews ended up having almost a full year to prepare for annihilation! And Haman must wait and seethe all that time. It was God who was overseeing things.

- being changed to bring change -

Esther 3:8 Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws *are* different from all *other* people's, and they do not keep the king's laws. Therefore it *is* not fitting for the king to let them remain.

Esther 3:9 If it pleases the king, let a *decree* be written that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who do the work, to bring *it* into the king's treasuries."

Esther 3:10 So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews.

Esther 3:11 And the king said to Haman, "The money and the people *are* given to you, to do with them as seems good to you."

Ahasuerus didn't even ask who the people were! He was a terrible king.

There are a number of lessons here:

1. One is that authority over others is never to be taken lightly. It is a precious obligation that requires searching-out the truth of matters.
2. Another lesson is to be very cautious about those you promote into leadership.

Esther 3:12 Then the king's scribes were called on the thirteenth day of the first month, and a *decree* was written according to all that Haman commanded - to the king's satraps, to the governors who *were* over each province, to the officials of all people, to every province according to its script, and to every people in their language. In the name of King Ahasuerus it was written, and sealed with the king's signet ring.

Esther 3:13 And the letters were sent by couriers into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth *day* of the twelfth *month*, which *is* the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions.

Esther 3:14 A copy of the document was to be issued as law in every province, being published for all people, that they should be ready for that day.

Esther 3:15 The couriers went out, hastened by the king's command; and the decree was proclaimed in Shushan the citadel. So the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Shushan was perplexed.

**Perplexed** is an understatement! There you are in Persia, minding your own business, when all of a sudden a law is passed that says on a certain day you can exterminate an entire people and confiscate their property. We know from secular sources that Jews were heavily involved in business dealings in Persia; many of the Persians were friends with Jews.

All the while Ahasuerus and Haman are at a bar!

Don't expect the world to make sense. It only makes sense if you remember you are part of the larger spiritual conflict that is occurring behind the scenes.

Mordecai took a stand for God; he should have expected his enemy to try to cut him down. Anytime you take a stand; anytime you are standing; you will be a target. Don't be perplexed – thinking something strange is happening to you.

Applying the Word...

If you are going to stand, or take a stand, remember a couple of things:

1. Make sure you are standing for something biblical. You are not being persecuted or attacked for being a Christian if what you did was wrong!
2. While standing against your enemies, you should be kneeling before God. Let prayer and the Word of God strengthen you in your stand.

Maybe you are not a believer. Then that's you, sitting at the bar. It doesn't matter if you see yourself as Ahasuerus or Haman. Both of them were losers. They had everything the world has to offer, only to discover the world has nothing that can ultimately satisfy. "Eat, drink, and be merry – for tomorrow you die." Just know that it is appointed to men once to die, but then comes judgment.

