

The most famous American feud is between the Hatfields and the McCoys. They were two families who lived on opposite sides of the Big Sandy river. The McCoys lived in Kentucky and the Hatfields lived in West Virginia.

No one knows exactly how the animosity began, but it started some point in the Civil War. The Hatfields fought for the confederacy and the McCoy's for the union. There was some dispute over a pig and who owned it. The feud escalated into brawls and then murder when Asa McCoy, who fought for the union was murdered by a group of former confederate soldier.

The violence only escalated over 30 years as over a dozen different members of both families would be killed by each other. The most violent encounter was the New Years Night massacre. The Hatfields surrounded a McCoy home, set it on fire, and then shot anyone who tried to escape, including two children.

For 50 years, the feud continued until 1901 when they agreed not to end the feud, but they have a truce and a pause on the bloodshed. The hatred between the Hatfields and the McCoys spanned generations. As recently as 2003 the two families were engaged in lawsuit over who has access to a family cemetery.

But that kind of hatred is not new. Rivalry and hatred between different peoples has existed as long as sin entered the world. We can see glimpses of it and smaller rivalries like those between sports teams. Like between the sooners and the Cowboys and the Longhorns. We can see it much more often between political parties. We can see the tension and hatred between peoples and races throughout our nations history. We can see hatred and division between those live in rural areas and smaller communities, and those in big cities and the way that they speak about one another.

And behind a lot of this tension, we also see the hatred between the empires of the world and the people of God. Because behind every division of humanity is the enemy. By enemy I mean, the demonic realm and sin. This is the root of all of our division. In many times, we can get

distracted by the divisions up on the surface and miss what is that the root of it.

In Esther chapter 3 we are going to talk about the root of this division. And I hope that we see this division plays itself out in the book of Esther that will help us to better understand the division that we will all face in our lives. Turn with me in your Bibles to Esther chapter 3.

I. The Empire hates God's people (v. 1-6)

This again is at the root of division.

Our enemy and the enemy of humanity hates us.

He hates us because all of humanity is made in the image of God.

And because God has given humanity, the opportunity to rule and reign with him forever.

The enemy wants to destroy every human being that he can.

And he especially hates and opposes those who follow God.

Those who are part of the covenant community of God.

And the world, every empire, and every nation at its core oppose God's people, even when it isn't obvious.

And this is itself playing out in Esther's story.

We've been laying the groundwork in the first two chapters.

But now the conflict is going to boil up and really begin.

And the primary instigator of this conflict in the book of Esther is going to be Haman.

Verse one, **"After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, and advanced him and set his throne above all the officials who were with him."**

No, this should be strange.

If you remember last week, we ended talking about how Mordechai had thwarted a plot to kill the king.

And he told Esther and Esther told the king and they wrote down that Mordecai was the one who saved the king.

And then the very next thing that happens is not that Mordecai is promoted, but Haman is promoted.
Someone we don't know anything about.
We haven't been introduced to him yet,
And he hasn't done anything yet.

Have you ever been passed over for a promotion that you deserved?
Maybe you saw it go to someone else who didn't put in the extra time,
who didn't put in the extra work, and who really didn't deserve it like you did?

That is what happens here.
But there is also something else that happens.
We are told that Haman is **"the Agagite."**

We can be tempted, especially when we read names, especially if they are Hebrew names to skip over them.

We don't know how to pronounce it and who really cares that's what I need to know.

But you need to know because nothing in the Bible is there on accident.

Because if you were a Jew and you heard this book.
And you said there is someone elevated over Mordecai his name is Haman that would not mean a lot to you.
What if I said that he was an Agagite, you would say oh there it is.

Because Haman is an Amalekite.
Agage was the king of the Amalekites.
And they were one of the ancient enemies of God's people, the nation of Israel.

When the people of Israel had been freed from slavery in Egypt.
As they were wandering as fugitives with no land and no place and very little.

The Amalekites thought they were easy prey, and came down to destroy them and take what they had.

So God miraculously delivered them in Exodus 17.

It is were Moses kept his hands raised so they could win the battle.

And God promised, and said that there was going to be war between the Amaleke and Israel from generation to generation.

And God promised to bring justice to the Amalekites vengeance on them because of how they treated the week.

We also know that Mordechai is a descendent of king Saul.

You may have wondered why it told us that last week.

It didn't tell us that so that we could know that Mordecai was important and a noble.

It told us that because in first Samuel 15 Saul was commanded to go kill the Amalekites because of their wickedness and their evil and their injustice.

But He decided to let the king live and steal all his wealth.

Because of actions, David gets to become king.

And because of Saul's actions, the malachites are still here generations later and now the Amalekites are going to try to wipe out Israel again.

So ancient blood feud has been going on for centuries.

And you had better believe that Mordecai, as a descendent of king Saul and Hayman, a descendent of the king of Agag are especially going to be primed to hate each other.

And they do.

Verse two, **"And all the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage."**

Everybody bows down to Hammond because of his position.

Because he's the second most powerful person in the empire.

But Mordecai refuses.

Mordecai will not bow down.

Verse three, **"Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you transgress the king's command?""**

the servants ask, why are you not doing what you're supposed to do?

Why are you protesting?

This is about big deal. Why are you risking your life?

Verse four, **"And when they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai's words would stand, for he had told them that he was a Jew."**

They continue to ask him why he won't do this every single day and finally we find out that it's because Mordecai is a Jew.

Now what we need to understand is that Mordecai is not making a righteous stand here.

Or at least not a religious stand.

They are not being commanded to bow down in a worship and prostrate themselves before Haman.

They are just to bow down in respect.

Something that Jews do repeatedly.

This is something that Esther is going to do before the king.

It is not violating the law of God to bow down to someone like Haman.

Now it is possible that Mordecai is being legalistic.

That he is refusing because it violates his conscience and he would never bow down to anybody just in case it could be taken his worship.

At most this is a secondary issue.

What is interesting is that Mordecai has no problem revealing his Jewishness over this

But he doesn't want Esther to reveal her Jewishness over anything.

It's fine for Esther to be made part of the harem.

It is fine for Esther to eat food against God's law.

It is fine for Esther to not obey any of God's laws publicly so that no one can find out her heritage.

But it's not fine for Mordecai to have to bow to an Amalekite.
That is where the line is.

The heart of this, I think, is hatred between these two.

We are meant to see that this is not Mordecai taking a righteous stand, but this is Mordecai letting his hatred to get the better of him as well.

And sometimes we act just like Mordechai don't we?

We know that the world hate those who follow God, and so sometimes the world acts like those who hate believers.

And so far too often, our response is hatred.

The way that we talk about the world we talk about people who are unbelievers is not as if we care about their souls and we want them to come to join us and be our brothers and sisters in the faith but that we want them to die and go to hell.

We talk about their ungodly ways with venom and vile and hatred.

Normally we are tempted to violate all of God laws and compromise all over the place for ourselves.

But then, when Jesus tell us to love our enemies,

To bless those who curse us, there we draw the line and say no.

The Amalekites hate Israel, but they are not required to hate back.

And if we are going to be followers of Jesus.

If we are going to be a part of the people of God, in the kingdom of God, we need to act like Jesus.

And we respond to the hatred of the world with hatred, but with love.

Verse 5, we Haman finds out. **"And when Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage to him, Haman was filled with fury."**

It seems like it took a while for Haman to notice.

Mordecai's protesting really didn't matter at all until he was told about it. He did not even see or notice it before. But once he does, he is filled with rage.

Verse 6, **"But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus."**

And he decides it's not enough to just kill Mordecai,
Now he wants to kill all the Jews.

It's an insane overreaction.

It is an escalation and supremely wicked.

It also shouldn't surprise us because this is what the Amalekites have been trying to do Israel from the beginning.

This is what our enemy tries to do.

But the question is, how are we going to respond?

The hatred of the world is a fact. Jesus told us disciples. Don't be surprised when the world hates you.

That this opposition, and this hatred is normal and regular.

So the moments and times when we feel a lack of it.

That is the exception.

That is not normal.

And maybe we should wonder sometimes that we don't feel the world's opposition or hatred if that's because the world has become so much more holy or if it's becoming, we don't really seem like we're following Jesus at all.

II. The Empire seeks (to destroy) God's people (v. 7-15).

The world in the Empire does not just not like us.

The goal of the empire is to get rid of us.

First, they will try assimilation like we talked about last week.

They'll try to get us to become like the world.
To stop following Jesus and follow ourselves or follow other gods instead.
And most of the time that works.
Most of the time we fall for that.
And when we don't, then they move towards other kinds of destruction.

Mordecai has not assimilated enough.
So Haman moves forward with his plan to exterminate all of the Jews in the Persian Empire.

Verse 7, **"In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, they cast lots) before Haman day after day; and they cast it month after month till the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar."**

this part seems a little strange to us.

The text gives us some elaborate dates and then tells us that Haman is casting lots or rolling dice after today.

The reason that he is doing this is he's looking for a good omen.
He is seeking the will and favor of the gods before he goes to the king with his plan.
And so every day he cast lots to ask the gods "is today the day I can move forward and trying to kill the Jews?"
Nope, not today. OK maybe tomorrow

And he rolls them for a year.
365 days continues to roll the dice.
There's a couple things we can see here.
We can see that hatred and his anger is not gone away, even though lots of times passed.
His hatred is firm and committed.
We also see the control of God.

The name of God might not be explicitly stated in this book .

But his fingerprints and his providence and his sovereign control are all over the place.

Proverbs 16:33 says that **“man rolls the dice, but God determines how they fall.”**

God is determining when Haman’s dice will tell him he can move forward to this plan.

And those dice won’t fall the way God wants them to until God decides it’s time.

After all, what do you think the odds are that 365 times in a row the omens would say no?

I don’t know exactly how the lots worked and how often you gotten an affirmative answer.

I’m assuming you get a yes more than one out of every 365 times.

But he doesn’t because God is determining how they fall and God won’t let us move forward until He is ready.

So the day comes and goes before the king in verse 8, **“Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, “There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king’s laws, so that it is not to the king’s profit to tolerate them.”**

Haman tells the king much lies and half truths.

He’s trying to dehumanize the Jewish people and to create excuses if they need to be destroyed.

First, he makes it seem like these people are all over the kingdom.

It’s almost like they are sinisterly, trying to poison the empire.

And he says that they have their own laws, which is true, but he says they don’t keep the law which we know is false.

He knows it isn’t.

There is only Mordecai who isn’t bowing down to him.

So this is exaggeration and a lie.

After all from what we've seen, it seems like the Jews aren't really following their own laws at all.

They're mostly just following the Persian laws and Persian customs.

It says that there's no reason for them to be alive.

That their lives are harming the kingdom in the Empire.

Verse nine, **"If it please the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay 10,000 talents of silver into the hands of those who have charge of the king's business, that they may put it into the king's treasuries."**

Haman says, let's kill all of these people and I'll upfront some money and pay whoever will kill them bounty.

Is willing to personally finance their destruction.

Verse 10, **"So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews."**

The king takes his ring, which is the sign of his authority and power and gives it to Haman.

Again, we get Haman whole name just in case you have missed that the Amalekites are the enemies of God's people.

But it's also remarkable is that once again makes decisions.

The king also doesn't ask any follow-up questions.

He doesn't tell me more about these people.

He doesn't ask what their laws are.

He doesn't want to know how many of them in the kingdom they're really are.

He doesn't want to interview and talk to cross-examining.

He doesn't know where this anger coming from .

He is totally indifferent to destruction of tense of thousands of people.

It's not even like the king hates them. It's just like he doesn't even consider them people at all.

You know for a long time many doubted Esther was historically true. The story of an empire randomly deciding to commit genocide with indifference seemed too far fetched.

The origin of most of this doubt came from a group of theologians in the 18th century in Germany, which is ironic.

But this story is repeated in history particularly against the Jews. And we see genocide happen over and over again in our world.

Verse 11, **"And the king said to Haman, "The money is given to you, the people also, to do with them as it seems good to you."**

The king says the people are now in your hands do with what you will. The Empire handing over the people of God to the enemy saying do what you want.

But the reality is, and we know that God's people are not in the hands of the Empire. They are in the hands of God.

God is still in control.

And no one who is in God's hands can get out.

He keeps us safe.

God keeps His people safe, and they will not suffer anything that He doesn't allow.

This can and should bring us comfort when we read stories like this genocide and the attack on his people.

Now this decree of destruction begins to go out verse 12, **"Then the king's scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and an edict, according to all that Haman commanded, was written to the king's satraps and to the governors over all the provinces and to the officials of all the peoples, to every province in its own script and every people in its own language. It was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet ring."**

Everything that Haman wants is going to happen.

And the laws to be spread out throughout the entire empire, so that everyone can find the people of God and killed them.

Verse 13, **"Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with instruction to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods."**

It is clear that they mean to annihilate them.

The young and the old.

Even the women in the children.

They seek to remove their memory.

Verse 14, **"A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province by proclamation to all the peoples to be ready for that day. ¹⁵ The couriers went out hurriedly by order of the king, and the decree was issued in Susa the citadel. And the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was thrown into confusion."**

So this goes throughout the entire Empire and everyone sees it.

They are all supposed to make preparations for about a year from now when they will get to do this.

Haman and the king sit back to drink more alcohol because that's what they do.

And as they do, the entire city is confused.

The Jewish people are terrified and worried and wondering how this is happening.

And the other people are also wondering, what are we doing?

Who do we hate? Who are we getting ready to kill?

I want you to see it mentions all these dates again.

Because they are significant.

The day that is appointed.

The day of the Jews destruction providentially is the day right before the Passover lamb is sacrificed.

When Israel was slaves in Egypt, the Empire tried to destroy them and wipe them out.

And the plagues and destruction and death were coming, but God kept them safe.

And for the last plague, the last time they were to take a pure and spotless lamb and sacrifice it.

And the blood of the lamb would keep the angel of death at bay.

So now another angel of death is coming.

Another plague is falling the House of Israel

The question is, will we get to live to see Passover?

Will God save people again?

Will they be destroyed?

The enemy does want to destroy God's people.

And because of the history of God's chosen people being persecuted throughout history, we rightly can be more sensitive to when the world opposes us or mistreat us.

1 Peter 5:8 tell us that our enemy Satan roams about like a lion looking for souls to devour.

But the reality is that most of us opposition does not have to take the form of the Empire of the world passing laws that Christian are about to be killed.

There are places in the world where it is dangerous to be a Christian.

It is dangerous to be a Christian or in Russia or North Korea

Or in Islamic countries Christians have to live in hiding.

But for those of us who live here, it's not dangerous.

But the enemy still seeks to destroy as he uses different means.

One of the ways that are enemy to us by us to give to our sin

Because sin leads to death

Sometimes when we talk about sin, we think it purely in terms of like we did something. God doesn't want us to do.

And at the end of time, you know there's gonna be a big list of all the stuff we shouldn't have done.

When we can just think of it like oh man, God is disappointed and my list is getting longer. Oh well.

Sin is not just something that we do. Sin is a power.

Sin is a sickness.

Sin is a cancer.

And when we sin the power and that sickness havoc in our lives.

It wreaks havoc on our souls and our bodies.

Our sin havoc in our communities and it leads to death.

Enemy doesn't have to seek your physical death if he can get your spiritual death, but just making you walk him instead of walk and following Jesus.

Pay attention to how the enemy is seeking to destroy Christians physically But don't miss how the enemy is seeking to destroy you spiritually by leading you into sin.

Now, this is all pretty heavy.

It should be because this is a heavy chapter and a heavy book.

But what is the gospel have to say about this? How do we find Jesus in this chapter and in the book of Esther?

Point number three Jesus (loves) and seeks (to save) God's people.

The primary emotion that God feels towards you is love.

The primary action that God takes towards you is one of love.

And God is not seeking your destruction, but he is seeking your salvation.

You see we have wronged God.

All of us are sinners and have fallen short of the glory of God.

Not that we have done wrong things, but we have rebelled against God.

And many of us if we are honest, have hated God.

Some of you may still have hate towards God in your heart.

And author, other scriptures, we see that there are people who hate God. Even among the community of God, there are those who hate God. Those who killed the stoned and beat them because they hated what they said.

And the response of God to our hatred.
The response of God to our disobedience is not at all like Haman. He does not overreact and decides He is going to destroy everybody because of the act of one person.

God would have the ability to destroy all of humanity because of all of our sins.
But God responds with love.
Jesus comes down to earth.
Though we have hated God and that we killed His messengers, God Himself comes down to us not to condemn us, but to save us.

And Jesus shows us we do not deserve
And the grace of Jesus does not just come on one person, but it comes through Christ for all.
It is the righteousness of Jesus, the second Adam, that all are made right and can find salvation.

Though we were his enemies, Jesus comes and dies on our behalf.
He does not come to kill us to wipe us out.
He comes to spread his arms and spill his blood.
Just say that we should be nice to our enemies he said that we should love them.
And Jesus showed us what that love looks like because he did it.
Jesus loved, even though who were murdering him and offered them forgiveness.

He didn't do this as a nice example so we can tell each other how could be a better place if we were kind.

Jesus truly extends his hand to his enemies and invites him to come.
Jesus invites all of us to be adopted into his family.

You see the covenant community of God.

Those who are followers of God are no longer only the people of Abraham

The people of God are no longer just the Jews.

The blood of Jesus, Jews, and gentiles and malachites and people from every tribe and every who hate each other brother and sister

In Christ.

This is what Jesus does.

Jesus did not come to destroy us. He came to save us and to love us.

So we go out into the world, and as we face the opposition and the hatred of the world and its empires, we should do so who have been loved and saved by Jesus.

When we hated and rebelled against God, Jesus loves us, and Jesus saved us, and Jesus has changed us.

So now when we go forward and we are hated and we are opposed, we should respond as Jesus did us with love and forgiveness and the offer to come and follow Jesus with us.

And we can respond not in a battle where we have to fight.

We can just respond with the gospel.

Spiritual war is real, but the weapons of Jesus are not like the weapons of the world.

The weapons of the kingdom of God or the gospel and the love of Jesus.

We follow Jesus and we live like Jesus and we proclaim and we priest

Jesus because we know that Jesus will save us, and Jesus will deliver us as he wants again and again and again, and he will do one more time at the end of the world.