

Before There Was Hamas, There Was Haman

By Lönngren Taljaard

24 January, 2024 It is a new year and the war in the Middle East wages on. Late last year, the war was sparked by the Islamic Resistance Movement (HAMAS is its acronym) aimed at the sovereign state of Israel. It is, as with the war in the Ukraine, a war for territory. Aided by the political debate that has been sparked since “Operation Al-Aqsa Flood” first reignited rocket fire over Israel accompanied by a breach of the Gaza-Israel barrier by 3000 Islamic militants — Christians have been divided in their interpretation of the war.

The reason for this disagreement among Christians is wide ranging, but if it were to be reduced to its basic form, it is clear that it comes down to what they believe about Israel’s future. Some, like mainline Covenantal thinkers, place little value on future Israel as a nation with territorial boundaries, while others, myself included, interpret Bible prophecy and promises regarding Israel as containing not only spiritual blessing, but also tangible and measurable territorial blessing.

The former may lead to an interpretation of the current conflict as merely a sad humanitarian disaster (of course any loss of innocent lives is tragic), however, of no-to-little biblical importance or significance as Israel’s future is concerned. The latter view, which, broadly speaking, is the Premillennial interpretation, necessarily sees current events in the Middle East as yet another pagan attack on a nation to whom Yahweh has promised a lasting legacy (Ez. 37:25-28).

My intention is not to rehash the many biblical promises made to Israel, nor the extent to which they relate to current events, but simply to remind us that diabolical attacks on Israel have been the norm throughout the centuries, and that for the sake of elect Jews, Yahweh has been

sovereignly in control of such attacks, not the least of these — Auschwitz. At this point it is necessary to highlight that the promises, as for instance those contained in the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12) which speak of a geographical territory promise, have not yet been fulfilled for Israel. Another important distinction is that the promises contained in the Abrahamic Covenant do not involve each and every Jew, rather they apply only to those Jews who, as the prophet Jeremiah reminded Israel, are circumcised of heart (Jer. 4:1-4). In other words, covenant promises are only for those Jews who were truly saved as an inward reality (circumcised of heart) and not just circumcised as an outward ritual. The same applies to any elect Jew today or in future. To them belong the covenant promises, not to every Jew who can present a Jewish passport (Rom. 9:6; 11:2-5).

The Gaza conflict, then, theologically speaking can have the following result in present-day Israel (and Jews not necessarily residing in Israel). It can have a spiritual purging effect on the nation in general as the Lord continues to separate his elect from the non-elect of the nation of Israel. This is in essence similar to the way God draws gentiles to himself through various kinds of trials and tribulations, and this is cause for rejoicing (Jas. 1:2-3). However, it is important to note, and this is the main point, that attacks such as these and other historical attacks on Israel are satanic assaults aimed at eradicating God's promises and interfering with His sovereign modus operandi on planet Earth. Attempted Jewish genocide is no new invention, and in particular, deserves highlighting at this point. Now someone might ask, why would Satan provoke a conflict in which many die, not just saved Jews, if any for that matter? Would it not benefit him more if unsaved Jews remain alive to help him fulfil his own desires? The point is that his hatred for a nation to whom the patriarchal promises belong is so deep seated that it justifies the means, not that Satan has any sense of what is truly just, but as it fits his lustful desire to rule over God.

Enter the book of Esther. Contrary to what the name of the book suggests, this Old Testament account of Jewish history is not about Esther, even though she did play a pivotal role in how matters concluded. Rather, the book is about the preservation of the Jews during their Persian exile through the leadership of Esther's cousin and godfather, Mordecai. What we find in this book that is most significant to the discussion before us is the planning of the killing of all the Jews, including Mordecai, by a certain Agagite man named Haman, who was an evil henchman of Satan and a prefiguring of Adolf Hitler who attempted to rid Europe of all Jews. Instead, Mordecai eventually discovers Haman's evil plot against the Jews, and by God's sovereign intervention through Esther's involvement in the harem of king Ahasuerus, stops Haman's evil plan. The account concludes with Haman being hanged on the very gallows

which he had erected to hang Mordecai. Here follow some excerpts from Esther which help to understand how things turned in favour of the Jews:

As has already been stated, Esther is a *Jewish book*, with a *Jewish male* named Mordecai as the lead historical figure, aimed at showcasing God's provision and protection of *Jewish people*. The plot thickens as soon as Haman the Agagite, son of Hammedatha goes on an evil power trip which does not preclude the total annihilation of the Jews within all Persian provinces. Ever since Mordecai refused to bow before King Ahasuerus, Haman was hell bent on getting Mordecai executed and the Jews done away with. We read:

"⁵ Then Haman saw that Mordecai was not bowing down or prostrating himself before him. So Haman was filled with wrath. ⁶ But he despised in his eyes to send forth *his* hand against Mordecai alone, for they had told him *who* the people of Mordecai were; therefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus."

It is easy at this point to doubt God's plan because the King agrees to Haman's request for the total eradication of the Jews (Esther 3:8-11). However, by Yahweh's grace and covenant keeping faithfulness toward the Jews, this evil plan was, needless to say, stillborn. Chapter 4 tells us that news of this evil plot reached Mordecai who then acts as a redeemer to Israel. This is also where Esther, the Jewess enters in as an ally in the resistance effort, all resulting in a nation-wide lament.

"Now Mordecai came to know of all that had been done. And he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city and cried out loudly and bitterly. ² And he went as far as the king's gate, for no one was to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. ³ Now in each and every province where the word and law of the king reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many made their bed in sackcloth and ashes.

⁴ Then Esther's young women and her eunuchs came and told her, and the queen writhed in great anguish. And she sent garments to clothe Mordecai and to remove his sackcloth from upon him, but he did not accept *them*. ⁵ Then Esther summoned Hathach from the king's eunuchs, whom the king had appointed to attend her, and commanded him to go to Mordecai to know what this was and why it was. ⁶ So Hathach went out to Mordecai to the city square in front of the king's gate. ⁷ And Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact

amount of silver that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries to cause the Jews to perish. ⁸ He also gave him a copy of the written law which had been given in Susa for their destruction, in order to show Esther and to tell her and to command her to go in to the king to implore his favor and to seek him out for her people.

⁹ Then Hathach came back and told Mordecai's words to Esther. ¹⁰ Then Esther spoke to Hathach and commanded him *to reply* to Mordecai: ¹¹ 'All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king to the inner court who is not summoned, he has but one law, that he be put to death, unless the king holds out to him the golden scepter so that he may live. And I have not been summoned to come to the king for these thirty days.' ¹² So they told Esther's words to Mordecai.

¹³ Then Mordecai said *for them* to respond to Esther, 'Do not imagine that you in the king's house can escape any more than all the Jews. ¹⁴ For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not reached royalty for such a time as this?'"

The pivotal moment in the Jewish resistance comes in the form of Esther's involvement. Very intelligently, responding to an offer from the King to grant her every wish, she requests to present a banquet in which she plans to reveal not only the evil plan to destroy the Jews, but also the evil mastermind behind the plan. In some way this plan was an ancient rendition of the well known "bait and switch" tactic, by which Esther cleverly lures Haman in and then turns on him. In broad strokes, this is evidence of Yahweh at work for his nation. It is at the banquet that Esther reveals this evil plan of Jewish genocide, which Ahasuerus was lulled into in chapter 3, but which he, by God's grace decrees to oppose, starting with the execution of Haman.

"³ Then Queen Esther answered and said, 'If I have found favor in your eyes, O king, and if it *seems* good to the king, let my life be given to me as my petition, and my people as my request; ⁴ for we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be caused to perish. Now if we had only been sold as slaves, men and women, I would have remained silent, for the adversity would not be worth the annoyance to the king.' ⁵ Then King Ahasuerus said—he said to Esther the Queen, 'Who is this one, and where is this one, who fills his heart to do thus?' ⁶ So Esther said, 'An adversary and an enemy is this evil Haman!' Then Haman became terrified before the king and queen. ⁷ And the king arose in his wrath from drinking wine *and went* into the garden of *his* palace; but Haman stayed to seek for his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that calamity had been determined against him by the king. ⁸ Now the king returned

from the garden of *his* palace into the place where they were drinking wine. And Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was. So the king said, 'Will he even assault the queen with me in the house?' As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.⁹ Then Harbonah, one of the eunuchs who *were* before the king, said, 'Behold indeed, the gallows—which Haman made for Mordecai who spoke good on behalf of the king—are standing at Haman's house fifty cubits high!' And the king said, 'Hang him on it.'¹⁰ So they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had set up for Mordecai, and the king's wrath subsided."

I once heard the story of an Islamic militant who created a package bomb which he intended to send to what Muslims call an infidel (everyone not Muslim). He didn't pay enough postage for the package, hence it was labelled "return to sender." Upon receipt of his own package, he did not recognise it and excitedly opened it up, only to blow himself into an eternity without God. Whether true or not, what goes around does indeed come around.

As much as Haman schemed to have the Jews killed, starting with Mordecai, his entire plan backfired on himself. What an incredible account of poetic justice. The resistance could not have been any more concise or simple. Haman plots. Mordecai, Esther and Jews lament. Esther requests. Haman hanged!

Moral of the story. Don't mess with God's plans for the Jews, because his plans involve saved Jews. Yes many of them have died godless. Yes many of them alive today are godless. Maybe they have made themselves a "Shylock" to the world in certain ways. But tread carefully with them we must, for the sake of God's elect (Rom. 11:23-24).

In conclusion, anti-Jewish sentiment has been rife in Christendom. In the west, violent behaviour toward them can be seen as far back as the Crusades. Hateful responses to them can be witnessed in the Reformation, particularly at the hand of the original Reformer, Martin Luther. Lately, many left-leaning politicians have taken the side of Hamas, including the ANC.

Christian's, however, cannot resort to such responses. We owe a sense of gratitude to the patriarchs, prophets and apostles, all of whom were Jews, for the conveyance and proclamation of the message by which we were finally saved. May we never lift a haughty finger against God's elect within Israel.

¹⁸ "...do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast against *them*, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root *supports* you" (Rom. 11:18).