

Dr. Elaine Phillips, Esther, Session 3 of 4, Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Phillips, Esther, Session 3 of 4, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Elaine Phillips' lecture analyzes the Book of Esther, focusing on the conflict between Haman and Mordecai. **The lecture examines Haman's** rapid rise to power, his demand that Mordecai bow to him, and Mordecai's refusal based on his Jewish identity. **Haman's subsequent plot to exterminate the Jews** is detailed, including his deceitful presentation to King Xerxes and the issuance of a destructive decree. **The lecture then explores** Mordecai's and Esther's responses to the decree, Esther's courageous decision to reveal her Jewish identity to the king, and the providential events that ultimately lead to Haman's downfall. **Finally**, the lecture analyzes the use of language, doublets, and literary devices within the text to highlight the narrative's themes and suspense.

**2. 20 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Phillips, Session 3 – Double click icon to play in Windows
media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and
click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Historical
Books → Esther).**



**Phillips_Esther_Sess
ion03.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Phillips, Esther, Session 3 of 4

Okay, here's a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided excerpts of Dr. Elaine Phillips' lecture on the Book of Esther:

Briefing Document: Dr. Elaine Phillips on Esther Chapters 3-6

Executive Summary:

This lecture excerpt focuses on the dramatic events unfolding in Esther chapters 3-6, highlighting the rise of Haman, his plot to annihilate the Jews, Mordecai's defiance, and Esther's growing role as a protagonist. Dr. Phillips emphasizes the use of literary techniques such as doublets, irony, and wordplay. She also draws attention to the themes of power, identity, ethnic conflict, and the unseen hand of God.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Haman's Rise and Arrogance:

- **Rapid Ascent:** Haman's sudden rise to power is emphasized by the use of three verbs ("made him great, lifted him up, and seated him over others") rather than the usual two, indicating the significance of his elevation.
- **Replacement of Advisors:** The removal of the king's numerous advisors and Haman's singular empowerment suggests a shift in power dynamics, possibly as a result of security measures after the failed coup mentioned in chapter 2.
- **Demand for Homage:** Haman, not Mordecai, is elevated and demands to be honored with prostration; a double act of "bend the knee and to fall on one's face". The demand, coming directly from the king, is meant to be a public display of his power.
- **Humiliation and Rage:** Haman becomes enraged by Mordecai's refusal to bow, this is a personal humiliation since he had not even noticed the defiance at first. Learning Mordecai is a Jew, he seeks to destroy the entire Jewish population not just Mordecai.

1. Mordecai's Defiance and Jewish Identity:

- **Refusal to Bow:** Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman, framed as an act of civil disobedience and a public affront, is directly tied to his Jewish identity and religious beliefs.

- **Unique Terminology:** The specific Hebrew words used for bowing down to Haman "kor'im u'mishtahavim" are always used in the bible in reference to God. This distinction shows that Mordecai is not refusing to honor those in power but refuses to honor humans with the honor reserved for God.
- **Public Stand:** Mordecai chooses to make his stand in the gate, the place of public activity, making his defiance known. He doesn't just refuse to bow; he refuses to listen to all persuasion to change his mind.

1. Haman's Plot for Annihilation

- **Generalization and Deception:** Haman presents the Jews as "a certain people" who are dispersed, different, and disobedient. He uses half-truths and lies to manipulate the king, carefully not revealing which laws the Jews allegedly break.
- **Financial Incentive:** Haman's offer of 10,000 talents of silver is a significant sum and a clear appeal to the king's greed. The true motivation for the sum may be to plunder Jewish property.
- **Wordplay and Deception:** Haman may have played on the similar sounds of "avad" (to annihilate) and "avad" (to enslave), deceiving the king into thinking the plan was to enslave rather than exterminate the Jews.
- **King's Apathy:** The king's cavalier acceptance of Haman's plan, dismissing it with a wave of his signet ring, is shocking and highlights the danger of unchecked power.

1. The Edict of Annihilation:

- **Timing and Irony:** The decree to annihilate the Jews was written on the 13th of Nisan, the day before Passover, highlighting the tragic irony of impending doom instead of deliverance.
- **Bureaucratic Process:** The bureaucratic machinery springs into action, using passive verbs, to create a sense of distance and non-involvement as the decree was written.
- **Brutal Language:** The decree's language uses three strong verbs "destroy, kill, and annihilate" followed by a comprehensive list of victims, from young to old and women and children.

- **Widespread Reaction:** Couriers spread the edict to the far reaches of the empire with a sense of glee. However, the population of Susa is described as being agitated about the decree.

1. **Mordecai's Grief and Action:**

- **Public Mourning:** Mordecai's public display of mourning with torn garments, sackcloth, dust, and ashes symbolizes ritual impurity, separation from God, and the great personal grief he feels.
- **Strategic Location:** Mordecai makes a public outcry at the gate to draw Esther's attention and compel her into action.
- **Communal Mourning:** Mordecai's individual mourning is mirrored and amplified by the entire Jewish population, who express grief through fasting, weeping, and wailing.

1. **Esther's Initial Hesitation and Transformation:**

- **Unaware:** Initially, Esther is completely unaware of the decree and its implications. She initially tries to quell Mordecai's outburst.
- **Fear of Death:** Esther's initial response is fear based on the king's law that anyone who approaches him unsummoned could be put to death. She states that she hasn't been called to the king for 30 days, suggesting possible isolation or distance from the court.
- **Mordecai's Challenge:** Mordecai challenges Esther's position of privilege, warning her that her silence will not save her and that she may have been placed in her position "for such a time as this". He suggests the Jewish people will be delivered, but she must be a significant part of it.
- **Shift to Action:** Esther transforms from a passive recipient to an initiator, publicly identifying with her people.
- **Corporate Fasting:** Esther calls for a radical corporate fast, demonstrating her commitment and inviting divine intervention, and indicating her Jewish tradition. She even includes her young attendants in this fast.
- **Acceptance of Risk:** Esther recognizes the risk of her plan, stating "when I perish, I perish", yet takes action.

1. Esther's Strategy and the Banquets:

- **Royal Entrance:** Esther prepares carefully for her entrance before the king, dressing in royal attire as a counterpoint to the way Mordecai was dressed.
- **King's Favor:** Esther's regal demeanor wins the king's favor. He extends his scepter and grants her an audience.
- **Strategic Delay:** Esther invites the king and Haman to a banquet, then to a second banquet, to delay revealing her true request. This strategy builds suspense and allows her to manage the situation carefully.
- **Doublets and Diplomacy:** Esther uses doublets, mirroring the king's language, in her invitations, demonstrating her skill and control of the situation.
- **Twinge of Jealousy:** Esther's decision to say she is preparing the banquet for both the king and Haman may cause a sense of jealousy for the king, and a possible reason he stays up all night.

1. Haman's Boasting and Rage:

- **Contrasting Moods:** The joy and high spirits of Haman contrast sharply with Mordecai's continued refusal to acknowledge him in any way.
- **Self-Centered Pride:** Haman boasts about his wealth, his many sons, and his exalted status, revealing his self-centered pride. His achievements are all meaningless as long as Mordecai lives.
- **Zeresh's Counsel:** Zeresh, Haman's wife, advises him to erect a high pole and have Mordecai impaled on it, indicating his complete loss of control and a need for revenge.
- **Grand Scale:** The height of the pole is in keeping with the grandiose nature of all royal action and parallels the statue in Daniel chapter 3.

1. Providential Reversals:

- **Insomnia and Discovery:** The king's insomnia leads him to read the chronicles, which reveal Mordecai's good deed and the injustice done to him.
- **Unfolding Events:** The timing of events, including Haman's presence and the king's request, highlight the providential hand orchestrating events. The lecture mentions that all of these are coincidences that could not have happened without the hand of God.

- **Irony of Fate:** The circumstances are ironic because the man who wants to destroy Mordecai actually is being used by God to help exalt him.

Quotes:

- "The king, according to verse one, made Haman great, lifted him up, and seated him over others, creating a hierarchy. The use of three verbs instead of the usual two indicates the significance of this elevation."
- "The terms specifically mean to bend the knee and to fall on one's face."
- "Here, the Hebrew words are kor'im u'mishtahavim. The same pair of Hebrew words does not occur in any of the passages describing honor to another human. Instead, when these two verbs are used together, the individual is performing them in the presence of God."
- "A certain people, the Hebrew is ah-me-chad, made them sound sinister in that they were unnamed, and yet only one, and therefore insignificant and probably dispensable."
- "If the king was under the illusion that this was a sale for enslavement and that it was for the good of his realm because his people posed some sort of threat, his response may be somewhat more understandable."
- "In contrast to the sense of distance and non-involvement created by the repeated use of passive voice, here we see the decree-enjoining action."
- "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."
- "Her closing words to Mordecai are telling. In spite of this astonishing corporate appeal for divine mercy, she expected the enterprise to fail. Her statement might be translated when I perish, I perish, indicating her recognition that death was the likely outcome of either choice."

Conclusion:

The excerpt from Dr. Phillips' lecture provides a rich analysis of the pivotal chapters of Esther, revealing the complex interplay of human ambition, ethnic conflict, and divine providence. It shows Esther's transformation into a strategic actor and highlights the power of identity and courage in the face of injustice, as well as the importance of language and strategy. The narrative is full of irony and tension.

4. Study Guide: Phillips, Esther, Session 3 of 4

Esther Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. What was the significance of the king's promotion of Haman, and what specifically did it entail?
2. Why did Mordecai refuse to bow down to Haman, and what was the significance of the Hebrew words used to describe the bowing?
3. How did Haman's rage at Mordecai's defiance lead to his plan for the Jewish people?
4. Describe Haman's strategy for convincing the king to exterminate the Jews and what tactics did he use to do so?
5. What is the significance of the date chosen for the planned destruction of the Jews, and what does it reference?
6. How did Mordecai react to the decree, and what did his actions symbolize?
7. What was Esther's initial response to Mordecai's message about the decree and why was she hesitant to approach the king?
8. Summarize Mordecai's message to Esther and explain why it was so forceful and urgent.
9. What was Esther's plan, and how did she show her public identity with her people at this point?
10. What occurred during the first banquet and why did Esther not make her request to the king?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The king's promotion of Haman was significant because he was singularly empowered over all others, with a hierarchy created, indicated by the use of three verbs instead of the usual two. The promotion included Haman being made great, lifted up, and seated over others.
2. Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman because it was an act of worship he reserved for God. The specific Hebrew words used, *kor'im u'mishtahavim*, are

used elsewhere in the Bible only in the context of honoring God, and never for a human.

3. Haman's rage at Mordecai's defiance led him to formulate a plan to destroy not only Mordecai, but all of the Jewish people, seeing it as an opportunity for wholesale annihilation and ethnic cleansing.
4. Haman used a combination of a vague and ominous descriptions of a "certain people", half-truths and outright lies about their disloyalty to the king and the laws, and a large sum of money as a bribe to persuade the king. The tactic was to make the Jews appear like a dispensable and sinister group that it would be pragmatic to eliminate.
5. The date chosen for the planned destruction was the 13th of the first month, the day before Passover, a pointed reminder of the great deliverance from the bondage of Egypt, which now the Jews would face another oppressor.
6. Mordecai reacted to the decree by tearing his clothes, wearing sackcloth, putting dust and ashes on his head, and crying out loudly. These actions symbolized ritual impurity, separation from God, and the deep shame and bitterness over the imminent threat to his people.
7. Esther's initial response was great distress and an attempt to quell his actions, as they were not suitable to court protocol. She was reluctant to approach the king because it was forbidden to enter his presence without being summoned and she had not been called for 30 days.
8. Mordecai's message was forceful, stating that she would not escape harm by virtue of her royal position and that if she did not act, deliverance would come from another place, but she and her family would perish. He also posed that she may have come to the royal position for the very purpose of saving her people.
9. Esther's plan was to approach the king, despite the danger, and reveal her identity and her people's plight. She organized a corporate and comprehensive fast, both for herself and her young women, displaying an open identity with her religious heritage.
10. During the first banquet, the king inquired about her request but Esther requested that the king and Haman attend a second banquet the next day. She was not yet ready to reveal her request, and sought to buy time and further her calculated plan, piquing the king's interest and perhaps lulling Haman into a false sense of security.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the characters of Haman and Mordecai. How do their motivations, actions, and flaws contribute to the overall conflict and themes of the book?
2. Discuss the role of divine providence in the events of Esther. How does the narrative portray God's involvement in the story, given that the name of God is not explicitly mentioned?
3. Explore the significance of Esther's transformation throughout the narrative. How does she evolve from a hidden queen to a courageous advocate for her people?
4. Discuss the theme of power and authority in Esther. How are power dynamics displayed and challenged within the Persian court and among the characters, and what does the book say about those who have power?
5. Analyze the literary techniques and rhetorical devices, such as word play, repetition, irony, and suspense used to enhance the narrative and communicate its themes.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Kor'im u'mishtahavim:** Hebrew words that mean "to bend the knee and fall on one's face." They describe an act of worship that is due only to God and not to humans.
- **Ha-goral:** Hebrew term meaning "the lot," which refers to the practice of casting lots to make decisions, often seen in the Bible.
- **A-me-chad:** Hebrew term meaning "a certain people," or "a people, one." Used by Haman to describe the Jews in a disparaging way.
- **Avad (spelled with an aleph):** Hebrew word meaning "to annihilate." It is similar sounding to "avad" (spelled with an ayin)
- **Avad (spelled with an ayin):** Hebrew word meaning "to enslave." Haman may have played on the similar sounds of these words when making his case to the King.
- **Tsorer:** Hebrew term meaning "adversary," or one who causes distress. A stronger term than "enemy" and is used to describe Haman's relationship to the Jews.
- **Sackcloth and ashes:** These were signs of mourning and repentance in ancient Jewish tradition. The sackcloth was a coarse garment and the ashes signified death and humility.
- **Maze ve'al maze:** Hebrew phrase possibly meaning, "what on earth are you doing?". Esther asks this of Mordecai when he refuses to remove his sackcloth.
- **Mishte yayin:** Hebrew term meaning "a feast of the wine." This refers to a separate course in a banquet, often held towards the end.
- **Tov lev:** Hebrew term meaning "good heart," or "high spirits." This phrase describes Haman's state of mind before he sees Mordecai.
- **Beit HaMalchut:** Hebrew term meaning "king's hall," or "palace." The repetition of this term creates suspense in the narrative.
- **Sefer Divrei Hayamim:** Hebrew term meaning "Book of Remembrances", "Matters of the Days", or "Chronicles". It is the official record of the Persian Court.

5. FAQs on Phillips, Esther, Session 3 of 4, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions about the Book of Esther, Chapters 3-6

1. **Why did Mordecai refuse to bow down to Haman, and what was the significance of this refusal?**
2. Mordecai refused to kneel down and pay homage to Haman because the specific Hebrew words used to describe this act (*kor'im u'mishtahavim*) are only found together in the Bible when referring to worship before God. While Israelites sometimes bowed before kings, these words denoted a level of submission reserved for God. Mordecai's refusal was thus rooted in his Jewish identity and a refusal to give to a human the honor due to God alone, making it an act of both religious conviction and civil disobedience. This was interpreted as a challenge to Haman's authority and a public affront to his honor.
3. **How did Haman's rage over Mordecai's defiance escalate, and what was his plan?**
4. Haman's rage over Mordecai's refusal to bow evolved quickly from personal insult to ethnic hatred. Discovering Mordecai was Jewish, Haman dismissed the idea of punishing only Mordecai and instead formulated a plan to destroy all Jews throughout the kingdom. This plan, driven by ethnic enmity and fueled by wounded pride, aimed at the annihilation of an entire people. Haman's plan is detailed as a proposed decree to kill and plunder all Jews on a specific day with the promise of a substantial amount of money into the royal treasury from himself, but perhaps also from the Jews' belongings.
5. **What tactics did Haman use to persuade King Xerxes to agree to his plan?**
6. Haman used several deceitful strategies to persuade King Xerxes. He presented the Jews as a dangerous, unnamed, scattered, and separate people with different customs who did not obey the king's laws. Haman also carefully avoided mentioning which laws were broken, likely referencing his own decree that Mordecai and others refused to follow. He then appealed to the king's greed, offering a massive sum of money (10,000 talents of silver) for the execution of his plan. Haman may have even intentionally confused the king using a wordplay of the Hebrew words for enslave and annihilate to conceal the true intention of genocide.

7. **How did Mordecai and the Jewish community respond to the edict of annihilation?**
8. Mordecai responded to the edict with public mourning, wearing sackcloth and ashes, a traditional sign of grief and humiliation. He cried out loudly, drawing attention to the injustice, with a potential intent to reach Esther. This individual response was echoed throughout the Jewish community across the provinces, who also mourned with fasting, weeping, and wailing. They lay on sackcloth and ashes, expressing their collective sorrow and distress.
9. **What was Esther's initial reaction to the news of the edict, and what prompted her to take action?**
10. Initially, Esther was greatly distressed and uncomfortable with Mordecai's public display, as she had spent years adhering to court protocol and feared the king's reaction. She tried to quiet his outcry by sending him clothes, and when that failed, she initially hesitated to take action, citing the king's strict law that anyone approaching the king unsummoned would be put to death. However, Mordecai's challenge, which placed her personal safety in opposition to her responsibility for her people and implied that her royal position may have been for the purpose of this very moment, finally convinced her to act. His warnings about her own potential death ultimately compelled her to take a risk.
11. **What strategic steps did Esther take to prepare for her encounter with the king, and what was her plan?**

Esther first requested a 3-day fast in which she would engage, and expected all of the Jewish people to participate in this fast as well. Esther then devised a careful plan that involved using her status as queen to approach the king. After dressing in royal attire, she made an unsummoned appearance before him. She initially invited the king and Haman to a private banquet. Her first invite was followed up by a subsequent invitation for a second banquet that she promised to prepare, carefully managing the situation to maintain control. These feasts, in addition to satisfying court culture, would have helped Esther create a private and more favorable setting for divulging the truth of the plan. Her goal was to use the banquets to expose Haman's treachery and reveal her Jewish identity strategically.

1. **How did Haman's pride and insecurity contribute to his downfall, and how was this revealed in chapter 5?**
2. Haman's pride and insecurity are highlighted at the end of chapter 5. He is elated by his wealth, position, and the fact that he has been invited to dine with the king and queen, and also invited for a second banquet. However, Haman was angered to the point of rage that Mordecai refused to show him the honor he believed he was due, even though the king honored him greatly. Haman's boastful recital to his family and friends revealed his deep-seated insecurity; he admitted his accomplishments meant nothing as long as Mordecai was alive and refusing to bow. His inability to bear the perceived slight reveals his obsession with personal recognition, ultimately fueling his downfall.
3. **How does the theme of divine providence appear in chapter 6, and what major reversal takes place?**
4. The opening of chapter 6 is built upon a series of coincidences that highlight the theme of divine providence. The king's insomnia led him to review the chronicles where Mordecai's act of saving his life was recorded. Haman's arrival at the palace to seek permission to hang Mordecai, and the king's desire to honor a person who had been loyal to him, all at the same time, represent a turning point in the narrative. This event ultimately results in the unexpected reversal of Haman's plan, with Haman himself being asked by the King to come up with an appropriate manner in which to honor Mordecai. This is another reversal of expectations, as Haman, in ignorance of who the king has in mind to honor, designs an elaborate ceremony that he is then forced to carry out himself for his enemy. This moment is crucial, as the events leading to this point had been driven by Haman and now a major reversal had happened, all while the king's insomnia and a seemingly simple read had been the vehicle of this reversal.