

Mordecai and Haman

- Esther 2:19 – 3:15
- Last week we ended with Esther walking to center stage as the eunuch choir belted out, “There she is, Miss Persia,” and she was crowned queen. And the king and the queen lived happily ever after, just like in Cinderella, right? No, not exactly, because this story is not a fairy tale but a real tale. So even while Esther was being fitted for her crown, there was ugly stuff going on outside the palace in the mean streets of Susa. We will get to that in a moment, but remember the main point of the story is that even when we don’t see God, or hear His name mentioned, as in this book of history in the Bible, that doesn’t mean He isn’t there. When you can’t trace His hand you can still trust His heart. As we said last week, this story is an extended illustration of the truth of Romans 8:28, “that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.” And today’s passage reads to me almost like a chess match between Mordecai and Haman, but don’t think for a minute that God is just watching the game unfold. He is moving the pieces around the board with a purpose. I have divided this text into 4 points that will outline the story for us. They are, Mordecai’s discovery, Haman’s promotion, Mordecai’s response, and Haman’s plot.
- **Mordecai’s discovery**
- While the new queen is being celebrated and feted, there is trouble brewing in the streets. Two of the king’s eunuchs are plotting his assassination. They happen to be the men in charge of the threshold, which possibly was the entrance to the king’s private quarters. So, they had opportunity. They are angry at the king for an unknown reason, angry enough to want to kill him. So, they had motive. Then it happens: one of those times in the story when the writer is clearly going, “Hey! Watch this. This is not a coincidence. This is the hand of God.” In verse 22 we learn that the plot of the two men was revealed to Mordecai. “And this came to the knowledge of Mordecai.” We know that he was sitting in the gate, which the writer tells us twice, and it is possible that he just overheard these two would-be killers conspiring together. Or it may be that someone else who knew about it came and told Mordecai. However it happened, we know Mordecai had an inside track for such information. He was the queen’s father! He told Esther. She told the king, and made sure the king knew that it was Mordecai who discovered the plot. The king told his men to investigate, which they did, and the two eunuchs were ‘hanged on the gallows.’ Which probably means they were impaled. Many believe it was the Persians who invented the first form of crucifixion. (Ezra 6:11) Then the writer tells us, “And it was recorded in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.” That’s important information that would ‘just happen’ to pop up again five years later.
- “But wait a minute!” Mordecai might have said. “That’s it? I save the king’s life and all I get is a mention in the book of the chronicles? Not even a t-shirt that says, ‘I saved the king’”? But hold on. It gets worse.
- **Haman’s promotion**
- Five years later (“After these things”), the king promotes Haman to his number 2 man. Why would he do that? Haman didn’t deserve the promotion; Mordecai did! Yes, but we live in a broken world. It’s not fair, and we often work hard for little or no results, or we get passed over for a promotion or a raise. Sometimes the least qualified person gets the job, while the best worker gets shown the door. We can respond in a couple of different ways when that happens to us: 1- We can react (get angry; pout; get depressed; we can quit; we can become passive aggressive: ok, if the boss doesn’t think much of my work, then that’s what I’ll give him: not much!) 2- We can rejoice (Luke 17:7-10) Mordecai served the Lord by serving the king. He reported the incident not to get a reward but because doing the right thing is its own reward.

- **Mordecai's response**

- The more interesting question is not how Mordecai responded to being passed over for promotion to the number two man in the kingdom, mainly because we don't know. But we DO know how he responded to Haman. He paid him a great no mind, as my great-grandmother used to say. When everyone else was bowing and scraping before Haman, Mordecai stood ramrod straight. He refused to bow. Why? It's a much discussed point in the commentaries, and opinions are all over the map, with the vast majority saying: "we don't know." Some say he wouldn't bow because he was a revolutionary, looking for ways to overthrow the Persian government. If that were true, it seems reasonable that when he heard of the plot to assassinate the king, he would have said, "Hey, boys, I'm in. How can I help?" So, why wouldn't he bow? There's one big fat clue in here. Look at verse 3. They ask him why. Then verse 4. They hound him day after day, wanting to know why. Then they went and reported him to Haman and said that all Mordecai would tell them when they asked why he wouldn't bow was, "I am a Jew." Oh, king, we kept asking and he kept saying, "I am a Jew." We don't care where you came from! Why won't you bow? "I am a Jew." Some interpret that to mean that Mordecai wouldn't bow because that would have been a violation of the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me." But I don't think so. This bowing before dignitaries was a Persian custom, much like putting your hand over you're heart when the national anthem is played. That's not a religious gesture, but one of respect and honor for our country and for those who have fought and died to keep it safe. No, I believe Mordecai wouldn't bow because he was a Benjaminite, a Jew, and Haman was an Agagite, a descendant of Agag, the king the Amalekites. And Mordecai was a Benjaminite, a direct descendant of King Saul. So many believe Mordecai would not bow because Haman represented to Mordecai the centuries-old feud between the Jews and the Amalekites. (**Exodus 17:8: the story; then verses 14-16**) Then **1 Samuel 15:1-3; 8-9**; When Saul made excuses for why he spared some, **verse 22-**)
- One vital biblical truth on display here. Truth to live by. Always do what God tells you to do. Saul disobeyed, and lost his kingdom, and the descendant of his disobedience now threatens to eliminate the entire Jewish race.
- **Haman's plot**
- Haman hears about Mordecai's refusal to bow and, verse 5, he was "filled with fury." But instead of just dealing with this one man, he decided to annihilate the entire Jewish population. What?! That would be like getting bumped by a little old lady at Aldi's, as her grocery cart filled with 14 cases of Ensure rolls over your foot and she doesn't even turn around or say she's sorry. And instead of asking her to be more careful, you decide to make it your goal to eliminate every little old lady in the state. The counselor might call that an "inappropriate response." And he might try to find the "behavioral triggers" that set off that response. Let's cut to the chase, here. Haman was a racist. He had been raised a racist. He came from a long line of people who were racists. He was taught as a child to hate Jews, that Jews were different, Jews were not the same as the rest of us, Jews were not good people. In fact, maybe he was taught that they were not really people at all. Does that sound familiar? Racial prejudice is an ugly sin that has incredible power to destroy.
- What seared the conscience of a 21-year-old man named Dylann Roof to the point that he could sit for an hour and have prayer with the nine people he was about to murder in cold blood, simply because they were black? How could he get to the point, even while so young, to write in his journal, "I have no choice. I am not in the position to, alone, go into the ghetto and fight. I chose Charleston because it is most historic city in my state, and at one time had the highest ratio of blacks to Whites in the country. We have no skinheads, no real KKK, no one doing anything but talking on the internet. Well someone has to have the bravery to take it to the real world, and I guess that has to be me."
- How could Dylann do this? The same way Haman could. They had given themselves over to the power of darkness. The scariest thing of all? It could happen to anyone not walking in the power of

God's grace. Paul says it this way about each one of us before we met Christ: "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of the world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience..."

- Haman is a son of disobedience, doing the bidding of his father, Satan, on track to destroy an entire population. He is not satisfied in just a personal vendetta. He wants to institutionalize his racism. He wants to use the political machine that is at his disposal to make genocide a matter of public policy. All he has to do is convince one man: the weak-willed King Ahasuerus. Notice how he does it.
- **He lies** (his father is the father of lies): "they do not keep the king's laws" (verse 8).
- **He bribes**: "I will pay 10,000 talents of silver" (verse 9) That money will not come from his oily pockets but from the plundered houses of the murdered Jews. It would be a 5th century holocaust.
- **He manipulates**: "If it please the king" (verse 9). He knows the king is weak, led by his emotions, and always does what he pleases. He is not a leader, evidenced by the fact that he turned over his signet ring to Haman, basically abdicating his responsibility to make decisions and be held accountable by others for them.
- One more comment I want to draw your attention to, in verse 8b, where Haman says, "it is not to the king's profit to tolerate them." That reminds me of what Al Mohler said about three things that need to happen for a cultural revolution to take place.
- #1. Something that was condemned is normalized. (Isaiah 5:20, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!")
- #2. That which is normalized is now celebrated. Romans 1:32 "Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them."
- #3. Those who don't celebrate it are condemned. "It is not to the king's profit to tolerate them."
- The deed is done, and they cast lots (Pur) in order to choose a day, Persian style, that will be the "luckiest" day for them to annihilate the Jews. Ironically, the day they cast the lots is the day before the Jewish Passover, when all the Jews are preparing to celebrate their deliverance. They cast lots for each day of the coming year, and the "lucky" day is chosen. The letters were then sent out to every province: exactly 11 months from today, it was decreed, you are to destroy, kill, and annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children.
- It looks like the last move on the board is checkmate for the Jews. But it's not. God always has the last move. In their lives. In ours.