

More Than a Sidekick: Serving Alongside Others

Session 5

August 18, 2024

Haman

The Point: Whatever you do, do it with humility.

Session Passages: Esther 3:1-9; 6:10-14

Esther 3:1-5

Connection to The Point. King Ahasuerus Xerxes greatly honored Haman in front of everyone. Haman showed no humility in receiving this honor; instead, he seethed with rage over the one man, Mordecai, who did not bow in his honor.

The setting. The events of Esther took place during the reign of the Persian king Ahasuerus (commonly identified by his Greek name Xerxes I) in the fifth century BC. During the third year of his reign, he convened a royal reception. This assembly lasted for 180 days, during which he displayed the splendor of his wealth, culminating in a week-long feast of fine food and drunkenness. In a drunken stupor, he called for Queen Vashti to show off her beauty for his guests. She refused. Upon counsel from his advisors, Ahasuerus Xerxes removed Vashti and set up a search for her successor. One candidate was Esther, a woman of exceptional beauty who won the king's approval and became queen. Her uncle, Mordecai, in the king's service at the King's Gate, advised Esther not to reveal her Jewish nationality.

After all this took place After these events things (v. 1). After learning about two conspirators plotting to kill the king, Mordecai told Esther who told the king on Mordecai's behalf. After an investigation, both men were executed and Mordecai's heroism was recorded (2:19-23).

Did King Ahasuerus Xerxes honor promote Haman (v. 1). Without explanation, the writer suddenly introduced Haman and reported his promotion while overlooking Mordecai.

Son of Hammedatha, the Agagite (v. 1). Haman's introduction as *the Agagite* immediately associated him with tensions between the Israelites and the Amalekites. These tensions extended back to fighting during Israel's wilderness experience and had continued for generations. During their initial battle while Moses interceded with the help of Aaron and Hur, Joshua's army won a great victory (Ex. 17:8-15). Balaam predicted a king "greater higher than Agag" (Num. 24:7) would rule Israel. Years later God directed Saul to kill Agag and totally destroy the Amalekites. Saul's army defeated their enemy, but Saul took Agag prisoner. Samuel the prophet hacked Agag to pieces and Saul's downfall began (1 Sam. 15). These facts might explain Haman's hatred for the Jewish people.

He promoted him in rank Elevating him Advanced him (v. 1). Haman appeared trustworthy to the king; therefore, Ahasuerus Xerxes advanced Haman to a position higher than the other officials around the king. Haman likely served in a capacity comparable to prime minister or chief counselor of the king. Yet Haman only wished to advance himself, as would soon be revealed. Without chapter divisions in the original text, the contrast between Mordecai's heroism and Haman's promotion provided an irony. This juxtaposition would highlight the divergent futures of these two men. God permitted Ahasuerus Xerxes to promote Haman to a position higher than all the other officials because He had purposes to fulfill through him. Haman's pride would bring about his downfall.

Bowed down and paid homage to Haman Knelt down and paid honor to Haman bowed, and revered Haman (v. 2). Anytime Haman passed through the gateway, the king's servants bowed in his honor. Having all his subordinate officers prostrate themselves with their faces to the ground would have fed the ego of the small man who held this big office.

The king had commanded this to be done The king had so commanded (v. 2). Following established customs of the time, the king's command would have been thought of as needless. This may indicate that the king's servants questioned Ahasuerus Xerxes's judgment with regards to his promotion of Haman. That he would have to command his nobles to bow down to the high ranking Haman perhaps indicates they did not think too highly of him.

Mordecai would not bowkneel downMordecia bowed not (v. 2). Mordecia refused to honor Haman in this way. He likely disapproved of the appointment and the subsequent order from the king for everyone to prostrate themselves to Haman. By bowing down before Haman, Mordecia would have acknowledged that a wide difference in status between himself and Haman existed.

“Why are you disobeyingdo you disobey the king’s command?”Why transgressesst thou the king’s commandment? (v. 3). Probably aware of the severe repercussions that could come, several in the king’s court questioned Mordecia’s refusal to honor Haman.

They had warned him day after dayDay after day they spoke to himWhen they spake daily unto him (v. 4). The king’s servants urged Mordecia daily to comply with the king’s order lest he face imprisonment or worse. Apparently Haman had busied himself taking in the accolades from the people and had not noticed Mordecia’s resistance.

They told Haman in order to see if Mordecia’s actions would be toleratedThey told Haman about it to see whether Mordecia’s behavior would be toleratedThey told Haman, to see whether Mordecia’s matters would stand (v. 4). Mordecia likely expected his refusal to bow to Haman would lead to trouble. Sure enough, other officials ratted him out, likely to judge the necessity of their own response to Haman.

Since he had told them he was a JewFor he had told them that he was a Jew (v. 4). Perhaps Mordecia had withheld this information about himself, as he had advised Esther, but pressure from court officials to comply led him to confess his Jewish heritage in answer to their daily questions. However, he stood his ground, refusing to pay homage to Haman.

When Haman saw that Mordecia was not bowing downwould not kneel downbowed not (v. 5). Haman’s promotion may have brought out the worst in his insecurities. When he saw that Mordecia refused to prostrate himself, Haman took it personally.

He was filled with rageenragedThen was Haman full of wrath (v. 5). The word rendered *rage* literally means heat, fever, venom. Instead of humility in receiving honor from the king, Haman allowed violent exasperation and bitter hatred to flood his heart.

Esther 3:6-9

Connection to The Point. Haman took advantage of his position and relationship with the king to hatch a plan to destroy the one man who would not bow in his honor.

It seemed repugnant to Haman to do away with Mordecia aloneHe scorned the idea of killing only MordeciaHe thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecia alone (v. 6). Haman’s feelings toward Mordecia for not bowing down to him and his feelings toward Mordecia’s race played off of each other and intensified his hatred for each.

He planned to destroy all of Mordecia’s peopleHaman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecia’s peopleHaman sought to destroy all the Jews (v. 6). Haman seethed in such hatred that he devised a plan to take out his wrath upon all Jews in the kingdom. He would find no satisfaction in taking Mordecia’s life alone or in making his life miserable. Haman assumed the self-appointed role of ridding the earth of all Jews. No doubt his exaggerated hatred of the Jewish people reached back to Israel’s wilderness experience (Ex. 17:16). Considering the scope of AhasuerusXerxes’s kingdom and Haman’s hatred, his plan would have included exterminating Jews in Palestine as well. Such a massive execution would have snarled God’s redemptive purpose. However, no mere man can cripple God’s ultimate plan.

The month of Nisan (v. 7). The first month of the Hebrew calendar corresponds to about mid-March to mid-April.

In King Ahasuerus’s twelfth yearIn the twelfth year of King AhasuerusXerxes (v. 7). AhasuerusXerxes’s (485-465 BC) twelfth year would have been about 473 BC. Esther would have been queen for about four to five years (2:16). Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, crushed Jerusalem more than a century before (586 BC, 2 Kings 24:10-17). Even when the Israelites began to repopulate Jerusalem with Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:1-2) or with Ezra (7:1-7), many Jewish people remained in Mesopotamia.

The pur— (that is, the lot)They cast Pur, that is, the lot (v. 7). The superstitious casting of lots had a long history among Eastern cultures. When Nebuchadnezzar and his leaders could not agree on military strategy, they paused to consult their gods through

divination (Ezek. 21:21). For Haman to cast the *pur* or the lot demonstrated his extreme devotion to the pagan religious practices that stressed fate and chance, magic, and astrology.

It fell on the twelfth month, the month AdarThe lot fell on the twelfth month, the month of AdarFrom day to day, and from month to month, to the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar (v. 7). Adar is roughly mid-February to mid-March. The meaning of *from day to day, and from month to month* is unclear. Perhaps the *pur* was cast repeatedly to determine the day of month, then the process followed again to determine the month. Haman had no clue the one true God who created and controlled the universe controlled this lot (Prov. 16:33). Note that Haman cast the lot in the “first month” and it fell on *the twelfth month*—almost a year later. God provided the Jews more than eleven months to prepare. It also gave Mordecai and Esther time to act.

Haman informed King AhasuerusHaman said to King XerxesHaman said unto king Ahasuerus (v. 8). With his evil plan laid out down to the exact day, Haman went to the king for approval. What began as anger towards one individual had escalated to talk of exterminating an entire race. In order to convince the king, Haman craftily mixed truth, inaccuracies, and exaggeration.

One ethnic groupA certain people (v. 8). Haman carefully chose his words. The Hebrew has the sense of an indefinite group. Stating it in this manner insinuated that AhasuerusXerxes’s kingdom had many different people groups; however, one of them had the potential to undermine him. Notice that Haman did not identify the people, at least not at this point. Furthermore, he likely exaggerated how this group had scattered throughout the Persian Empire.

Their lawscustoms are differentdiverse (v. 8). Haman never mentioned to the king his own long-standing prejudiced grudge that went back to his Amalekite heritage. While pretending to care about the king’s interests, Haman hid his real motive and falsely accused the Jews of rebellion. He said this certain ethnic group lived throughout the empire, kept themselves separate, and had a different set of laws. (The word rendered *customs* most often is translated as law or decree.) Haman may have presumed that Mordecai’s refusal to bow before him had some connection to Jewish law. However, Mordecai refused to do so on the principle of personal integrity, something Haman would have never understood.

They do not obey the king’s lawsNeither keep they the king’s laws (v. 8). Not only did they have different laws, Haman reported, but they placed their laws on a higher plane so that they did not obey Persian law. Though Mordecai had not followed the king’s command to bow before Haman, neither the book nor Haman offered any other evidence of disobedience.

It is not in the king’s best interest to tolerate themIt is not for the king’s profit to suffer them (v. 8). Haman clinched his argument by insinuating the possibility of a dangerous political backlash. He concluded that for the sake of the empire, the king needed to take proactive steps to thwart any possible rebellion. Haman lied. The Jews had not rebelled against any of the king’s laws but had lived as good citizens without causing disturbances.

If the king approvesIf it pleases the king (v. 9). After presenting the false charges of rebellion, Haman asked that the king approve a decree to exterminate the as yet undisclosed people.

I will pay 375 tons of silverI will givepay ten thousand talents of silver (v. 9). *Ten thousand talents of silver* equals about 375 tons. To entice the king further, Haman offered to underwrite the cost of the evil campaign. Essentially he bribed the king, yet he probably never intended any personal out of pocket expense. The payoff would come from the confiscated homes and possessions of the slaughtered Jews.

Esther 6:10-14

Connection to The Point. When Haman was directed to honor Mordecai, he did not embrace this task with humility but with humiliation.

Recap of Esther 4–6:9. In Esther 4, after the king’s edict authorizing the annihilation of the Jewish people spread throughout the kingdom, Jews joined in mourning and fasting while wearing sackcloth. Mordecai urged Queen Esther to intercede for her people. Initially, Esther balked, but when her uncle warned her own life was in jeopardy and stressed God could save His people with or without her, she agreed. Her trust in God provided the turning point.

In Esther 5, following days of solemn fasting, Esther approached AhasuerusXerxes and invited him and Haman to a private banquet during which she would make her request known. As they finished the meal, she heightened the king's interest in her request by delaying it for another day of feasting. Haman left in good spirits, but the sight of Mordecai changed that. At home he recounted how the queen had honored him as a special guest and invited him back the next day. However, he complained about Mordecai's refusal to honor him. He was encouraged to build a gallows and ask the king to hang Mordecai on it.

That night (Esth. 6:1-9) AhasuerusXerxes suffered from insomnia. In an effort to fall asleep, he asked his servants to read to him. They brought in the royal annals that included Mordecai's heroic deed of saving the king's life (2:19-23). The king consulted with Haman about how to honor someone. Self-centered Haman assumed the king wanted to honor him. He proposed that the man the king wished to honor should be dressed as royalty and led through the city on the king's horse by one of the king's closest advisors.

The king told Haman, "Hurry, and do just as you proposed""Go at once," the king commanded HamanThe king said to Haman, Make haste, . . . and do even so (v. 10). Haman never expected that the king would have referred to anyone but himself. What an opportunity to request at the same time that Mordecai, his sworn enemy, be hanged on the gallows Haman had prepared. What the king said next blew him away and left him speechless. What Mordecai had done to save the king's life occurred several years prior. Therefore, AhasuerusXerxes told Haman to hurry because he wanted no more delays in honoring Mordecai.

"Take a garment and a horse for Mordecai the Jew""Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew"Take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew (v. 10). God used the king to deliver the shocking order to Haman that could not have humiliated him more. Pleased with his prime minister's suggestion, the king ordered him immediately to secure the royal robe and horse for Mordecai. Such an order shook Haman to the core of his being.

"Who is sitting at the King's GateWho sits at the king's gate"Tha sitteth at the king's gate (v. 10). The writer seemed to accentuate Mordecai's loyalty by repeated references to his being at "the Kking's Ggate," where legal and official matters were handled (eleventen times; 2:19,21; 3:2,3; 4:2 (2X),6; 5:9,13; 6:10,12).

"Do not leave out anything you have suggestedDo not neglect anything you have recommended"Let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken (v. 10). God sovereignly ordered events so that Haman who came to curse Mordecai ended up blessing him with his words and actions.

Paraded him through the city squareLed him on horseback through the city streetsBrought him on horseback through the street of the city (v. 11). Haman sheepishly obeyed and carried out the king's wishes. Apparently AhasuerusXerxes knew nothing about the deep animosity that Haman held toward Mordecai.

"This is what is done for the man the king wantsdelights to honor"Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour (v. 11). Haman suffered the ultimate humiliation as he led the people to honor Mordecai, whom he desired dead, with the praise he craved for himself.

ThenAfterward Mordecai returned to the Kking's GgateAnd Mordecai came again to the king's gate (v. 12). Nothing that happened to Mordecai went to his head. He did not attempt to parlay the king's honor into a promotion, but rather returned to his normal responsibility in the court.

Haman hurried off for home, mournful and with his head coveredHaman rushed home, with his head covered in griefHaman hasted to his house mourning, and having his head covered (v. 12). With his pride crushed, Haman slinked off in a state of shock and humiliation. Facing his friends and family who knew of his bitter hatred for Mordecai had caused Haman to act like someone had died. His pride had been dealt a deathblow.

Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happenedTold Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to himHaman told Zeresh his wife and all his friends every thing that had befallen him (v. 13). Instead of receiving comfort from his wife and friends, they predicted Haman's downfall. They knew all about his plans to have Jews killed throughout the empire. Furthermore, they warned him that he had no chance to overcome Mordecai the Jew. Haman faced great risk by continuing his plot to exterminate the Jews.

While they were still speaking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and rushed Haman to the banquet Esther had prepared. While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and hurried Haman away to the banquet Esther had prepared. And while they were yet talking with him, came the king's chamberlains, and hastened to bring Haman unto the banquet that Esther had prepared (v. 14). Haman had looked with great anticipation to going to this second banquet with the king and queen. Now with a crushed spirit and with fear flooding from his heart, he shuffled his feet to the party knowing that his wife and advisors had predicted the start of his downfall.

The rest of the story. At the second banquet, the queen revealed the plot to destroy the Jews and that Haman had devised it. The king stormed out in anger, leaving Esther and Haman alone. Just as the king returned to the banquet hall, Haman fell on the couch where Esther reclined to beg for his life. The outraged king ordered that Haman be hanged on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai (ch. 7). The next day the king elevated Mordecai to Haman's former place. Esther pleaded for the king to revoke the edict to execute the Jews. Ahasuerus/Xerxes gave them authority to write a new edict authorizing the Jews to assemble and defend themselves against anyone who attacked them (ch. 8). On the day Haman had hoped to destroy the Jewish people, they turned back their attackers and killed many men, including Haman's ten sons (chs. 9–10).