

Trust in Yahweh with all your heart, and don't lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Don't be wise in your own eyes. Fear Yahweh, and depart from evil. (Proverbs 3:5-7)

*When Haman saw that Mordecai didn't bow down, nor pay him homage, **Haman was full of wrath. But he scorned the thought of laying hands on Mordecai alone, for they had made known to him Mordecai's people. Therefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the Mordecai's people.*** (Esther 3:5-6)

There are key elements in this story that are highly relevant to us today that we do well to ponder.

*After these things King Ahasuerus **promoted Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes who were with him. All the king's servants who were in the king's gate bowed down, and paid homage to Haman; for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai didn't bow down or pay him homage.*** (Esther 3:1-2)

We are not told directly, but I have to wonder **how much influence Haman** may have had in regards to this command for all the king's servants to, **in essence worship Haman**. It becomes abundantly evident throughout this story that Haman had a **super-inflated ego** that would stop at nothing to demand attention for himself. Additionally Haman seemed to be an **expert in distraction** and manipulation, particularly with **people in power** and authority. Haman's **lust for domination** and control was insatiable and eventually was the cause of his own demise. But his story can serve to alert us to be aware of **similar patterns** of manipulation and distractions in our day that can result in just as much a **threat to true followers** of God now as what transpired in the story of Esther and Haman.

Haman's prejudice was not only linked to his **feelings of offense** over not being given the 'respect' he imagined was due to him. His fury over **not being honored properly** particularly **by a Jew** was linked to his ancestral roots to **king Agag**. This was a king that **Saul had inappropriately saved alive** from a **total annihilation** of the Amalekites soon after Saul had been crowned to be king over Israel. Saul had been instructed to **commit karam** on the Amalekites, an ancient practice involving complete **destruction of everything** associated with a group of people. This meant **not only killing every person** connected or related to the targeted people, but **everything they owned** was to be completely **destroyed**, wasted, devastated, annihilated.

The **reason Haman became aware** of Mordecai's refusal to bow to him was because the **other servants were upset** about it and **reported it to Haman**. This indicates that Mordecai was **not being blatant or obvious** about his non-compliance, to the point that Haman had not even noticed it until it was pointed out to him. This is a **significant point** we should consider ourselves when it comes to **following our conscience**. It is not always necessary to **make a big scene** to draw attention to ourselves when a rule compels us to violate our conscience. (Doing so may indicate a problem of pride in ourselves that might prove as problematic as the people we feel must be resisted. The **condition of our spirit is more important** than the actions we take in the name of obedience to God.)

You shall remember all the way which Yahweh your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, to prove you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments, or not. He humbled you, and allowed you to hunger, and fed you with

manna, which you didn't know, neither did your fathers know; that he might make you know that man does not live by bread only, but by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of Yahweh does man live. (Deuteronomy 8:2-3)

Haman's disposition was actually reflective of the very **first angelic being** who **instigated the original rebellion** against God's authority in heaven. The **pattern** of his downfall is the same as what is repeated in those who fall for his temptations, for Lucifer-turned-Satan knows from intimate personal experience how effective pride can be in hardening the heart and resisting truth, and he is very subtle to entice everyone possible to be sucked into his mindset and join him in his fierce attack against truth.

You said in your heart, "I will ascend into heaven! I will exalt my throne above the stars of God! I will sit on the mountain of assembly, in the far north! I will ascend above the heights of the clouds! I will make myself like the Most High!" (Isaiah 14:13-14)

Haman's **passion for power and prestige** was coupled with his **lineage from king Agag** to produce in him **bitterness and desire for revenge**. Haman seized this as his opportunity to achieve a **spectacular revenge** against the very people who had committed karam on his people. Haman decided that his **advantageous favor** with the king could be **carefully curated** to give him ability to **annihilate the entire race of Jews** in all the empire, not just Mordecai. This **deadly mix of ego, political power and wealth** (this was a point of great pride for Haman as well) coupled with deep **lust for revenge**, produced a story that still affects the world today. Sadly however, as is often the case, the same people who were **targeted as victims** in this story, later turned to **use their rescue** by God to **imbibe a similar spirit against their enemies** as was used against them. This is **still playing out** in the world today on a scale unimaginable only a few years ago by the very same people group as was involved in this story.

Haman was certainly inspired by the author of evil, and from that spirit of jealousy and anger he carefully crafted a scheme to **pursue his own agenda of ascendancy** above others. Haman **exploited the king's trust** in him **leveraged the king's unawareness** of his diabolical intent to fabricate a view of reality that would **arouse fear of loss** in the king. Haman brought his scheme to the king **pretending to be a trustworthy confidant** seeking to protect the king's interests, while under cover he was **advancing his own diabolical agenda**. He manipulated the king both in political ways as well as playing the king's weakness of greed by offering a massive bribe in exchange for authority to 'protect the king's security' throughout his empire.

Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom, and their laws are different than other people's. They don't keep the king's laws. Therefore it is not for the king's profit to allow them to remain. If it pleases the king, let it be written that they be destroyed; and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who are in charge of the king's business, to bring it into the king's treasuries." (Esther 3:8-9)

Haman **invented slander** against a people group to make them **appear as an internal threat** to the political security of the empire. He insisted that differences in culture indicated potential insurrection.

Haman manipulated the **appeal of profit** by offering to underwrite his **security solution** for this 'threat' apart from any cost to the government while **benefiting the king economically**.

(A compelling aspect in this story is that **this exact same number of 10,000 talents** is the number Jesus used as the debt owed by a servant to a king in Matthew 18. I don't believe this is coincidental.)

As this story progresses, we see the issue of identity more sharply focused. **Mordecai is outed as a Jew** by his fellow servants, making not only him but all Jews in the empire a target of Haman's hatred and extermination. Meanwhile **Esther's connection** with Mordecai and her **identity as a Jew is kept a tightly sealed secret**, meaning that the **social dynamics** in this story becomes **complicated** for everyone. **She is the wildcard** God uses to counter the wicked schemes of Haman to destroy God's people. Yet circumstances serve to **test the integrity of everyone** involved, which is actually what **judgment** is itself – **exposing the truth** about the integrity and **actual motives** of everyone.

As the plot thickens and the danger intensifies, **Esther** is compelled to **face her own test of integrity**. She is **tempted to imagine** that by **hiding her identity** she might be able to save her life, but **at the cost** of everyone who defines **her roots** as well as her own **true identity**.

This **story is really about identity** and what we **choose to believe** about where our identity originates and **why that is so crucial**. The **test** Esther faced is **not that different** from what we will face from time to time. **There may be times** to lay low and **not flaunt the truth** about our identity when it is **wise to remain humble**. But sooner or later a **crisis comes** that **forces everyone to choose** how they relate to the issue of identity. Will we trust God's plan even if it may cost our life. Salvation has always involved faith – willingness to trust God rather than how we might scheme to rescue ourselves from shame, danger or even death. This is **judgment** – **who do we trust to define who we are**.

There is a subtle thread running through this story I have not noticed before. Haman was **expert in keeping the king distracted** and occupied so he had **no opportunity to think** for himself independent of Haman's constant involvement. We find clues throughout the story and it is important to note, particularly in light of current intense assaults to capture our imagination by social media, manipulative news, entertainment and intentional deceptions from every direction.

This king had a **weakness for acting impulsively** rather than waiting to make important decisions with a clear mind. This is evident in the first story of the book about the former queen. Beautiful queen Vashti was summarily and permanently banned simply **because the king took offense** at her rebuff of his **desire to gratify the lustful appetites** of the men he was entertaining. The **emotional backlash** resulted in amplifying the social disposition of **misogyny** throughout the entire empire. It was **for this reason** that Esther later was chosen as a replacement for the queen. But the **intense misogyny** was firmly **locked** in place, meaning Esther and everyone else knew she was just as **dispensable** as was her predecessor, and she had **no more assurance** of holding her privileged position than Vashti before her.

Because of this **weakness for acting impulsively**, the king was particularly **vulnerable to being exploited by narcissistic people** like Haman who was an **expert in distraction**. Haman had **manipulated the king to secure a death decree** to destroy all of the Jews in the empire, yet he likely **continued to distract the king** with unending busyness in order to **prevent him** from being able to **think objectively**. No time was allowed for **reflection**, wisdom, reason **or even contact** with the king's own wife. Only the relentless demand for attention by Haman.

Understanding this part of the story is important, because **we are similarly under assault** from many sources today having similar sinister motives on the part of those who are orchestrating these mass distractions for reasons not unlike those of Haman.

*At the king's command, the couriers took off; the order was also posted in the palace complex of Susa. **The king and Haman sat back and had a drink** while the city of **Susa reeled from the news**.*
(Esther 3:15 MSG)

*"All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, know, that whoever, whether man or woman, comes to the king into the inner court **without being called**, there is one law for him, that he be **put to death**, except those to whom the king might hold out the golden scepter, that he may live. **I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days.**"* (Esther 4:11)

This is significant. The **most attractive woman** in the empire had **not come into the thinking** of the king for **a month**. Why might that be? I believe that given the circumstances and **Haman's determined scheme to not allow the king even a moment** to have an original thought of his own – all this was part of Haman's carefully orchestrated plan to fulfill his goal of total extermination of the Jews. It was very likely Haman who was **continuously occupying the king's attention**, even to divert him from having time with his own wife.

Esther most likely saw this more clearly than anyone else, and it brought cause for trepidation and **fear, even jealousy**. Not only were all her relatives and ethnic group suddenly under threat of karam, but her own relationship in **marriage** with the king was **being eroded** by this **slick narcissist** intent on manipulating and **occupying the king's attention** while denying access to him from any other source.

This would explain, at least in part, **why Esther chose** to invite **both the king** (her own husband) as well as **Haman** (her archenemy) to her banquets. She was keenly **aware of her tenuous position** married to a king **prone to making unwise choices** based purely on **transient emotions**, now further complicated by a **diabolical insider** intent on manipulating and distracting the king 24/7 until he achieved everything he craved. Because Haman had so much mind control over the king, Esther realized she **dared not divulge the truth** about her identity or Haman's sinister motives before she first **gained more focus by the king** so he would be **ready to listen more openly** to her. Without first regaining more trust, what she would expose would **challenge everything** he was being conditioned to believe by his closest advisor, so she had to **first unsettle** what he imagined to be going on from the influence of **Haman's spell** over his mind.

If it were merely a matter of **wanting to regain the affections** of her husband after a long separation, it would make **little sense** for the queen to **invite another man to an intimate dinner party**. But Esther was insightful, and also **listened to the Spirit**. She was **aware** of how the **imagination**s of selfish, lustful men like Haman tend to run. If **Haman** in his prideful delusions **imagined** that the king's **deprived wife might find him attractive** over her husband, he might also foster a secret desire to encourage her interest in him which could morph into yet **another means to gain advantage** to himself. Esther could have sensed this weakness in Haman, and chose to **let him to be drawn by his own lusts** in a direction that would **eventually incriminate him** and seal his own fate when his true **depraved character was exposed** in front of the king.

*Then the king returned out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine; and **Haman had fallen on the couch where Esther was.** Then the king said, "**Will he even assault the queen in front of me in the house?**" As the word went out of the king's mouth, **they covered Haman's face.** (Esther 7:8)*

As the **infamous story of Haman** draws to an end, what might be **useful for us to learn** today? What choices that led to Haman's demise could we avoid to avert a similar fate to his?

*Then Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart, but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he didn't stand up nor move for him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai. Nevertheless **Haman restrained himself**, and went home. There, he sent and called for his friends and Zeresh his wife. Haman **recounted to them the glory of his riches, the multitude of his children, all the things in which the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king.** (Esther 5:9-11)*

Haman **derived** his worth and **identity** from both his **ancestry**, his **wealth** and his exalted **political position**. This led him to imagine that **he could have anything he wanted** in life by simply **leveraging** his skills and money to manipulate and deceive others for his own agenda. He took great pride in who he knew and what he owned while seeking to destroy anyone that got in his way.

*There is **a way which seems right** to a man, but in the end it leads to death.* (Proverbs 16:25)

Haman thought he could use his **wealth to blind the king** to his own evil character and control the direction of the king's choices for his own personal vendetta.

Haman imagined everything was going his way as he **rode the crest of fame and fortune** and power, until his own **ego and lust for power exposed him** in the end as the **fraud** he had created for himself.

In contrast, **Esther** chose the path of **integrity, honesty and risk**, choosing to **embrace her true identity** and people even when it was clear it could cost her her life. She did **not rely on her amazing beauty**, as effective as that was to launch her career as the first lady of the kingdom. She chose like Moses long before to **align with the people of God** even in their worst hour rather than cling to her privilege and wealth. Yet in doing so she came out as the hero of the story while Haman has gone down in history as the **poster child of villainy**.

As the most important Mentor of all time, Jesus too faced His own crisis of identity when it appeared that holding onto what God said could cost Him His life. His bitter enemy attempted to get Jesus to question His identity given His dire circumstances, but Jesus modeled what it looks like to fight the fight of faith successfully.

*The tempter came and said to him, "**If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.**" But he answered, "**It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'**" (Matthew 4:3-4)*

Jesus came to save us from the lie of sin, not to protect or defend His own life. Jesus relied solely on the Word of God, both written and received directly, as the foundation of His identity. And He allowed nothing to deter Him from complete trust and reliance on His heavenly Father as His source of life.

This is how He overcame the world, and the identity He forged through His reliance on His Father alone is the identity He gives to us so that we too may, by embracing, believing it, may be transformed into the same image as the Son.

*Therefore, putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, **receive with humility the implanted word**, which is **able to save your souls**. (James 1:21)*