



## **The Book of Esther**

Simi Hills Sunday School • 2017

Class 2

### **Sitting in the Gate**

*Esther 2:19 through 3:15*

- Sometimes we do things with no ulterior motive and later discover our actions have greatly affected the future
- Such was the case with Mordecai
- In our text, Mordecai acts to save the king from a sinister plot by two of his servants
- Little did he know this act would dramatically change the future
- And his act of saving the king may not have even been from kind intentions toward the king
- But wait! It gets worse...
- If Mordecai's unintentional actions changed the course of history, his intentional actions put not only himself but the entire Jewish race in jeopardy
- Let's pay close attention to the text as we continue our study of the Book of Esther

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- Esther 2:19-20

- 19) Now when the virgins were gathered together the **second time**, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate.
- 20) Esther had not made known her kindred or her people, as Mordecai had commanded her, for Esther obeyed Mordecai just as when she was brought up by him.

- These closing verses of chapter 2 are far from incidental to the story of Esther
- Although Ahasuerus loved Esther and she had been chosen as the queen to replace Vashti, a second gathering of virgins takes place
- These appear to be either the first group of virgins who are given a kind of second chance, or yet another crop of beauties found in the kingdom who have just finished their period of preparation
- Exactly who these women are does not matter
- What matters is that the king seems to be preoccupied with them and not with Esther

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- Esther 4:11

- 11) "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law - to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live. But as for me, **I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days.**"

- If Esther wanted to gain access to the king, this would not appear to be an opportune time
- The second problem is that Esther has not yet revealed her identity to the king, even though years have passed since she was made queen
- Knowing Esther was a Jew may have disqualified her from being a contestant in the queen contest

- But if the king knew her identity and accepted it, he most certainly would not knowingly condemn all Jews to death
- Why Esther is still doing as Mordecai instructs her is somewhat puzzling, as she is now the wife of King Ahasuerus and the Queen
- It is almost as though she were still a small child growing up in Mordecai's house
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- Esther 2:21-23
  - 21) In those days, as **Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate**, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus.
  - 22) And this came to the knowledge of Mordecai, and he told it to Queen Esther, and Esther told the king in the name of Mordecai.
  - 23) When the affair was investigated and found to be so, the men were both hanged on the gallows. And it was recorded in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.
- Mordecai stations himself in the gate near Esther's quarters
- Since Esther had kept not only her Jewish race a secret, but also her relationship to Mordecai, he had no direct access to the queen, who was surely secluded in the palace
- Two of the king's officials, Bigthan and Teresh, who seem to have been on duty there, became embittered against the king and conspired to kill him
- Somehow, Mordecai learned of this plot and reported the matter to Esther, who in turn informed the king in Mordecai's name
- One does not know Mordecai's motives in reporting this plot to Esther, but the fact that he reported it *to Esther* suggests Mordecai was probably more concerned about Esther than the king
- If Esther happened to be with the king at the time an attempt was made on his life, she would be in grave danger
- If the king were killed, she would most likely cease to be the queen

- Although Esther does give Mordecai credit for informing her of this plot, she still does not indicate her relationship to Mordecai or her identity as a Jew
- Yet another strange twist takes place in the story of Esther
- We would have expected Mordecai's "loyalty" to the king to be rewarded
- The incident was recorded in the chronicles of the king, but it was also promptly forgotten
- Instead of the next verse being about Mordecai's promotion, a man named Haman suddenly appears from nowhere and becomes the second most powerful leader in the Persian empire

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- Esther 3:1

- 1) After these things King Ahasuerus promoted **Haman** the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, and **advanced him and set his throne above all the officials who were with him.**

- We are given no information as to how Haman rose to power
- It is noteworthy that once Haman rises to power, we no longer find the princes mentioned from whom Ahasuerus formerly sought wise counsel

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- Esther 3:2

- 2) And all the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But **Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage.**

- Initially, the conflict was not between Haman and Mordecai but between Mordecai and the king's servants at the king's gate
- Mordecai refused to "**bow down or pay homage**" to Haman
- The king's servants could not help but notice and rebuked Mordecai for refusing to abide by the king's orders

- This did not change Mordecai's actions; he defended his actions by simply telling them that he was a Jew
- To him, being a Jew exempted or prohibited him from such acts
- This seems to have irritated the king's servants who informed Haman
- Now they would see whether Mordecai's reason would stand under the scrutiny of Haman himself
- Haman was furious
- How dare this man defy him and the king!
- Haman took Mordecai's words seriously
- If Mordecai refuse to bow down to him because he was a Jew, then this must mean all Jews would act in the same way
- If this were true, Haman would not be content to deal only with Mordecai; he would deal with all the Jews
- Haman approaches the king, and cleverly avoids mentioning the Jews by name but secures the king's permission to destroy all of them
- Haman uses two incentives to entice the king
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- Esther 3:8-9
  - 8) Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every other people, and **they do not keep the king's laws**, so that it is not to the king's profit to tolerate them.
  - 9) If it please the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and **I will pay 10,000 talents of silver** into the hands of those who have charge of the king's business, that they may put it **into the king's treasuries.**"
- 1) It would rid the kingdom of a rebellious people who would not submit to the king's authority

- 2) By his generous contribution to the king's treasury and the confiscation of Jewish assets, the king would be financially prospered
- Let's get to the real question of this week's class: "Was Mordecai's refusal to bow down to Haman an act of stubborn rebellion, an attitude and act which was typical of the Jews, or was he acting righteously?"
- Remember how Jeremiah had told the Jews that they should settle in Babylon, but only for a period of 70 years, and then they should return to the Promised Land?
- There were more to his instructions:

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- Jeremiah 29:7

7) But **seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile**, and **pray to the Lord on its behalf**, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

- Haman found it essential to misrepresent the Jews as a rebellious and dangerous element within the empire
- I think that it was in anticipation of this very danger that God led Jeremiah to admonish the Jews about how to behave while exiled to Babylon
- It is true that the Jews refused to worship idols, but nothing stopped them from obeying 'the king's laws'
- Now, don't get confused... I do not like Haman nor am I trying to defend him
- It's just that Mordecai's actions here, the actions of the faithless Jews who chose to stay in Susa instead of going back to rebuild the Promised Land with Ezra and Nehemiah, his actions don't seem to be spiritually guided, but personally sinful
- It's seems more like it's a case of Pride and Prejudice
- Mordecai's Pride vs. Haman's Prejudice
- Consider the following:

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- 1) The Bible indicates the Jews have consistently rebelled against God

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- Acts 7:51-53

- 51) “**You stiff-necked people**, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.
- 52) Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered,
- 53) you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”

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- 2) Artaxerxes agreed

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- Ezra 4:18-20

- 18) the letter that you sent to us has been plainly read before me.
- 19) And I made a decree, and search has been made, and it has been found that this city from of old has risen against kings, and that **rebellion and sedition** have been made in it.
- 20) And mighty kings have been over Jerusalem, who ruled over the whole province Beyond the River, to whom tribute, custom, and toll were paid.

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- 3) Bowing down to Haman wasn't act of worship or an acknowledgement of deity

- In Daniel 3, it is very clear that bowing down to the golden image is false worship
- Haman is angered by Mordecai, because Mordecai would not stand up or move for him as he passed
- This is not worship; this is simply showing respect to one in a higher position

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- 4) Other Godly Jews showed respect to their superiors

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- 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 24:8

- 8) Afterward David also arose and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, “My lord the king!” And when Saul looked behind him, David **bowed with his face to the earth and paid homage.**

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- Genesis 41:14

- 14) Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they quickly brought him out of the pit. And when he had **shaved himself and changed his clothes**, he came in before Pharaoh.

- Mordecai wears his Jewishness like a banner, he won't do anything to show respect to Haman
- God had actually commanded the Jews to serve the Babylonians

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- Jeremiah 27:6-15

- 6) Now **I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar**, the king of Babylon, my servant...
- 7) All the nations shall **serve him**...
- 9) So **do not listen** to your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers, your fortune-tellers, or your sorcerers, who are saying to you, '**You shall not serve** the king of Babylon.'

- The Jews weren't being asked to Worship the King, just being asked to show respect to his appointed officials



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5) Mordecai is being hypocritical

- If bowing to the King, or one of his officials, is some kind of false worship, then he is forcing Esther to do so
- Mordecai says, “I’m a Jew, and I will not bow”
- But, he instructs Esther to conceal her identity as a Jew, so she would have most certainly had to bow to the King and his officials
- Mordecai is setting Esther up to have perform this act of sinful worship
- AND – In Chapter 6, when the King orders Haman to see to it that Mordecai is honored, then Haman reluctantly agrees... And Mordecai willingly receives the honor
- If it’s wrong to bow down before a man and not only the one true God, then why would Mordecai allow others to do it to him?
- Back to the Story...
- Haman pulls it off
- He gets the King to agrees to let Haman have his way with the Jews

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- Esther 3:11

11) And the king said to Haman, “The money is given to you, the people also, to **do with them as it seems good to you.**”

- As Chapter 3 ends, the King and Haman sit down to a drink, and things look bad for the Jews
- It should not come as a surprise that things would go so badly for those Jews who refused to return to Jerusalem

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- A series of failures brings us to this low point in Chapter 3

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- The King had failed to heed the wise counsel of his princes, instead, he acts on the sole counsel of Haman

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- The King gives Haman complete authority so he can pass laws which the king has never even read

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- The King failed to honor a man whose actions saved his life and his kingdom, and he handed that kingdom over to Haman

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- Esther's submission to her step-father, even above her husband and king, also puts her in a bad light

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- Esther has become the Queen of Persia on false pretenses
- She didn't lie; she seems to have taken the position, "Ask me no questions, and I'll tell you no lies."
- The King did not ask, as any husband would want to know who his wife's relatives are
- Had the king known that Esther was a Jew, and that Haman's proposed action was against all Jews, he surely would have done otherwise

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- Haman is a wicked man and he not only hates Mordecai, but all Jews

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- Haman deceives the King and manipulates him

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- Haman seeks the destruction of an entire race

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- But the focus of this class is really on Mordecai
- Mordecai seems to be the central figure of the entire Book of Esther

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- Mordecai enters Esther in the contest to be Queen

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- Mordecai instructs Esther to keep her identity a secret

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- Mordecai exercises authority over Esther rather than her husband, the king

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- Mordecai brings the entire Jewish race into grave danger because of his stubborn pride
- Haman didn't even know about Mordecai until the king's servants drew his rebellion to this official's attention
- Even when rebuked, Mordecai would not submit or show respect

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- Here is the lesson for us!
- Beware of being like Mordecai, and practice sin in the name of Christianity

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- Many of us who live in the name of Christ have angered others because we were not acting like Christians

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- But, when we defend our actions as being Christian, the world sees our hypocrisy AND then concludes that all Christians are like us

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- Not only do we bring reproach upon ourselves, but upon the name of Christ

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- 1<sup>ST</sup> Peter 2:11-17

- 11) Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.
- 12) **Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable**, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may **see your good deeds** and glorify God on the day of visitation.
- 13) Be **subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution**, whether it be to the emperor as supreme,

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- 1<sup>ST</sup> Peter 2:11-17

- 14) or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.
- 15) For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.
- 16) Live as people who are free, **not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil**, but living as servants of God.
- 17) **Honor everyone**. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. **Honor the emperor**.

- Don't sanctify your sin with seemingly righteous labels

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- Don't exhibit fleshly characteristics, and change the label on what you are doing

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- Don't call being pushy and self-seeking, "**Zeal for the Lord**"

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- Don't call pursuing selfish inclinations, tendencies, and activities, "**Following God's Will**"

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- Don't call giving someone a piece of your mind, "**Admonition**"

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- Don't call getting even with someone, "**Requesting the Ecclesia's Help**"

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- Don't call being domineering, "**Leadership**"

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- Don't call spineless inaction, "**Submission**"

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- Don't call nosy probing into someone's business, "**Counseling**"

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- Don't call telling others how to live their life, "**Exhorting**"

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- Don't call criticizing other peoples' beliefs, "**Preaching**"

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- Don't let our own **Pride** get in the way of us admitting that we sometimes are not **Perfect**