

Esther 3:1-6

Esther 3:1-6 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. (2) And all the king's servants who were within the king's gate bowed and paid homage to Haman, for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai would not bow or pay homage. (3) Then the king's servants who were within the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you transgress the king's command?" (4) Now it happened, when they spoke to him daily and he would not listen to them, that they told it to Haman, to see whether Mordecai's words would stand; for Mordecai had told them that he was a Jew. (5) When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow or pay him homage, Haman was filled with wrath. (6) But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him of the people of Mordecai. Instead, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus; the people of Mordecai.

Questions On The Text

Who did Ahasuerus promote?

Verse 1: The king promoted Haman the Agagite and advanced him over all the princes of Persia. Agag, Haman's ancestor, was an Amalekite king. King Saul had been instructed by God, through Samuel the prophet, to annihilate the Amalekites and spare no one.

However, Saul spared Agag and left his execution to Samuel. It is therefore ironic that a confrontation is about to hatch between a descendent of Agag and Mordecai of the family of Saul. (See 1 Samuel 15.)

What was Ahasuerus' command?

Verse 2: Ahasuerus commanded all his servants to show respect to Haman. It makes one wonder why, in a culture where bowing with respect was the norm, in Haman's case the king's servants had to be commanded to do so. Mordecai steadfastly refused to do this.

Why did Mordecai not bow to Haman?

Verses 3-4: Bowing to show respect was not forbidden under the Mosaic Law (see 1 Samuel 25:23,41; 2 Samuel 9:6; 14:22,33), and in fact was an established part of ancient Eastern culture (see Genesis 33:3; 43:26; 50:18 for examples of this custom prior to the Mosaic Law).

The reason for Mordecai's disrespect of Haman ran much deeper. The Agagites were a branch of the Amalekites, and the animosity between the Jews and the Amalekites went back to Exodus 17:8-16 when the Amalekites attacked the Israelites en route from Egypt to Canaan. It has also been suggested that Mordecai might have been aware of, but unable to prove, Haman's involvement in the plot to assassinate the king. (See 2:21-23.)

What was Haman's response to Mordecai's disrespect?

Verses 5-6: Although he had not noticed Mordecai's disrespect till it was pointed out to him, Haman was infuriated. But instead of dealing immediately with Mordecai, Haman decided to bide his time and look for an opportunity to destroy the entire Jewish race inhabiting the Persian kingdom. Parallels have been drawn between Haman and Hitler.

Further Questions For Discussion:

Why would the king need to command his servants to show respect to Haman?

What do you think was Mordecai's motive in not paying homage to Haman?

Why did Haman not have Mordecai immediately arrested for disrespect?

Why do you think Haman wanted to destroy the Jews?