

Haman's Rage Against Mordecai

5: 9-14

DIG: As the tension mounts, so do the tempers. Why is Haman in high spirits? What is all the toasting about? What infuriates Haman most about Mordecai? What irony do you see here (see 3:2-6)? What does this say about Haman? About human nature?

REFLECT: What is your happiness based on? Can you be at peace in the midst of turmoil in your life? Comparing yourself to Haman, how do you react when someone touches your "hot button?" Do you simmer, explode or just get even?

Esther, the hostess, has been directing developments during her dinner party, but now the author allows us to see what happens to each of the guests immediately afterwards.⁷¹

Going home from the first banquet with **the king** and **queen**, Haman was on top of the world at the unexpected honor that had come his way. **He went out that day happy and in high spirits. But before he could leave the palace, his joy was stopped dead in its tracks. When he saw Mordecai at the king's gate and observed that he neither rose nor showed fear in his presence, he was filled with rage against Mordecai (5:9). Mordecai, his fast ended, had discarded his sackcloth and was back in his usual seat to taunt Haman with his deliberate indifference as he passed by. Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home (5:10).** In keeping with his calculating temperament, Haman did not allow his **rage** to show itself just yet. **He figured he would get his revenge in due time.**

Back at his house, everyone had to endure Haman's endless impressions of the dinner. Like inviting all your neighbors over to see the slideshow of your vacation, Haman called together his friends (advisers in 6:13b) and Zeresh, his wife, he boasted to them about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king had honored him and how he had elevated him above the other nobles and officials (5:11). **According to the Greek historian Herodotus, those Persians were held in highest honor that had the largest number of sons, and Haman had ten sons (9:7-10).** His boastings shed some light on his priorities. He mentioned his vast wealth even before his sons.

"And that's not all," Haman added. "I'm the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave. And she has invited me along with the king tomorrow (5:12). It was a rare privilege for a subject, no matter how high his position, to be invited to a banquet with the king. Occasionally, this was allowed; therefore, Haman

had reason to feel highly honored at the invitation he received from the queen by permission of the king. In his mind he was so favored that he did not suspect Esther of having any hidden motive for inviting him to a second dinner with Ahasuerus the next day. Haman didn't realize that it was, in reality, an invitation to his own execution.

But when Mordecai ignored him, he said to himself, "all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate" (5:13). With his place of power and all of his riches, Haman was still unhappy and dissatisfied because one person refused to honor him. His pride was the source of his sin. For the third time in the book of Esther, God's name is hidden (see 1:20 and 5:4). In 5:13 within the phrase **this gives me no satisfaction**, the name of YHWH (see my commentary on Exodus At - Moses' Second Objection and Answer) is hidden. It is formed by the final letters of four successive Hebrew words when read backwards: zH 'ynnW swH lY.⁷² His name was not overtly mentioned, but He was there nonetheless, working behind the scenes for their good.

His wife, Zeresh, and all his friends said to him, "Have a pole set up, reaching to a height of seventy five feet high, which is about fifty cubits or 23 meters, and ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai impaled on it" (5:14a). Rather than being hanged by the neck on a modern-type gallows, the Persians impaled people with nails on a wooden pole in public view, as lesson for all to see. That word haunts the story (2:23, 6:4, 7:9-10, 8:7, 9:13 and 25). But the pole that Haman built for Mordecai ended up being his own means of execution. **Providence!**

Zeresh's advice reminds us of Jezebel when her husband, King Ahab, was pouting like a spoiled brat (First Kings 21:1-6). Like Haman, all of Ahab's power and fame didn't satisfy him. His appetite for things could not be satisfied. He wanted just one more thing, the vineyard owned by Naboth. Jezebel's solution was to arrange the murder of Naboth so that Ahab could have what he wanted. Like Jezebel, Zeresh advised Haman to simply find some excuse to kill Mordecai.

The height of Haman's seventy-five foot pole constructed to impale Mordecai has been seen by some as fanciful, and lacking authenticity. The size of the pole was that high for all to see. It strikes some as exaggerated. And it certainly was unnecessarily high, but then everything constructed in Persia was on a grand scale, like the image of Nebuchadnezzar was 60 cubits or 90 feet high (Daniel 3:1).⁷³ The spectacle would be a lesson for all to see. The person nailed to the pole would be visible from all directions, higher than all the trees. The sight would make the point that Haman was in control and that no one should try to stand in his way. Therefore, the size of the pole really equaled the size of Haman's pride.

His wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Then go with the king to the banquet and enjoy yourself." The author again points out the world's idea of happiness. If Haman could just get rid of Mordecai first, then he would be happy at the next day's dinner. Haman wanted everyone to witness him crush Mordecai. His wife and his advisors assumed that the king would immediately grant his request. This suggestion delighted Haman, and he had the pole set up (5:14b). The enormity of Haman's evil is captured in the enormity of the death pole that he unknowingly constructed for himself!

The tension between Haman and Mordecai reached its peak here. From this point on the stress would be relieved little by little through circumstances that had already been set in motion. As the events unfold, we are reminded of seemingly insignificant events that the author had previously mentioned but not emphasized. ADONAI was at work behind even such a vengeful act of Haman's wanting to impale Mordecai on a pole.⁷⁴