

## GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

**DISCUSS:** Draw attention to the picture on **PSG page 104** and ask **Question #1: Who comes to mind as a person of deep conviction?**

**GUIDE:** Direct attention to **The Bible Meets Life** on **PSG page 105** to the story of the deep conviction of Rosa Parks and how her willingness to take a stand impacted the nation.

**SAY:** “Today we will look at two events in the life of Mordecai, Esther’s relative. In one, he was at the right place at the right time; in the other he took a stand that had serious consequences.”

Reinforce **The Point** on **PSG page 105: It’s always right to do the right thing.**

**PRAY:** Begin the Bible study with prayer. Ask God to give us the courage to always do the right thing and to take a stand when it is the right thing to do, no matter the cost.

## SESSION 2

# STAND WITH CONVICTION



### ***The Point***

It’s always right to do the right thing.

### ***The Bible Meets Life***

The constant barrage of news via social media and 24-hour news outlets can often dull us and make us passive observers. Others can feel overwhelmed by all the wrong

in the world and think there’s nothing they can do. We can’t fix every injustice we see, but we are called to step in where we can. Christians have no excuse for not doing the right thing when the opportunity is right in front of them.

### ***The Passage***

Esther 2:21–3:6

### ***The Setting***

The events in Esther occurred during the reign of King Ahasuerus, also known as Xerxes (486–465 BC). The king convened a royal banquet at Susa. When Queen Vashti refused to appear, he dethroned her. Ahasuerus appointed commissioners to assemble beautiful young virgins from whom he might select a new queen. Esther won the king’s favor, and he put the royal crown on her head. In obedience to Mordecai, Esther did not reveal her ethnic identity.

## Esther 2:21-23

**21** During those days while Mordecai was sitting at the King's Gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the entrance, became infuriated and planned to assassinate King Ahasuerus.

**22** When Mordecai learned of the plot, he reported it to Queen Esther, and she told the king on Mordecai's behalf.

**23** When the report was investigated and verified, both men were hanged on the gallows. This event was recorded in the Historical Record in the king's presence.

**1** ▶ **Verse 21.** God expects His people to stand against wrong. Verse 21 introduces an element that at first glance appears parenthetical or secondary in the unfolding drama of Esther. However, this event will possess great significance later in the story. The focus of the story shifts from Esther to **Mordecai**. Mordecai means "little man."

The biblical writer specified that this event took place **at the King's Gate**. In biblical times a gate provided access to a city or other enclosed area. It might consist of a simple opening in a wall or be an elaborate entryway with multiple chambers. Gates often included wooden or metal doors. These portals could be closed at night or at times of enemy attack. Towers built near the gate provided protection. The entrance to the Persian king's palace was evidently large. This gate was a huge structure measuring 131 by 92 feet. It could accommodate a number of people and served as an assembling point for officials in the Persian court.

Mordecai was at the **King's Gate**, when he learned of a plot against King Ahasuerus. Two **eunuchs**, men typically viewed as trustworthy and thus often employed in royal service, conceived a plan to murder the king. The biblical writer identified the men as **Bigthan and Teresh**. The biblical text does not state why these two **became infuriated** with Ahasuerus. The verb is a strong word for anger in the original language. The men's wrath surged out of control, motivating them to plot the king's death. The Hebrew phrase rendered **to assassinate** literally means "to send out a hand against." Assassins in the Old Testament period used such hand-held instruments as swords (2 Sam. 20:10), spears (18:14), or even tent pegs (Judg. 4:21). ◀

## STUDY THE BIBLE

### Esther 2:21-23



15 minutes

**SUMMARIZE:** Before reading the passage, set the context by summarizing the information in **The Setting** on page 108.

**LEADER PACK:** Distribute **Item 9: God's People in Captivity** to reinforce the historical time frame of the story of Esther.



**READ:** Read or ask a volunteer to read Esther 2:21-23.

**SUMMARIZE:** Use **Bible Commentary 1** to provide more information about the King's Gate and the plot to assassinate King Ahasuerus.

**GUIDE:** Refer group members to the first paragraph on **PSG page 106** to provide information about the strategic location of the King's Gate and the activities that transpired there.

**SUMMARIZE:** Use **Bible Commentary 2** to show what Mordecai did when he heard of the assassination plot.

**SUMMARIZE:** Use **Bible Commentary 3** to point out the recording of this event in the Historical Record, which will be seen again in the Book of Esther.

**DISCUSS: Question #2 (PSG, p. 107): What risks did Mordecai and Esther take in these verses?**

**GUIDE:** Refer to the examples of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Niemöller on **PSG page 108**, to show the importance of doing the right thing, no matter the outcome.

**2 ▶ Verse 22.** Translated very literally the first part of verse 22 reads: “And the word was known to Mordecai.” He may have overheard the two men planning the assassination or someone else may have informed him. The term translated *plot* can convey a wide range of meanings, including “word,” “speech,” “thing,” “matter,” “act,” “event,” “account,” and “reason.” Plots against Persian kings occurred with relative frequency in the ancient world. In fact, a powerful official in the Persian court named Artabanus led in the assassination of Ahasuerus in 465 BC.

When he learned of the conspiracy, Mordecai **reported** it to Esther. The Hebrew term basically means “to be conspicuous.” Thus it conveys the idea of something being manifest or being in sight. In the form in which the verb appears in Esther 2:22 it communicates the concept of bringing a matter to light, thus “declaring” or “reporting” it.

Esther 2:22 is a pivotal verse in the book. Mordecai deserved credit both for remaining alert and for maintaining communication with Esther. The queen merited recognition not only for reporting the plot to the king, but also for doing so in the name of Mordecai. ◀

**3 ▶ Verse 23.** Esther’s **report** regarding the assassination plot **was investigated and verified**. The Hebrew text of this phrase more literally reads: “and the matter was sought out and found out.” The rendering *was investigated* is appropriate because the Hebrew verb connotes earnest seeking. Careful investigation found or discovered the truth of the report. The investigation not only revealed the assassination plot, but also it established the integrity and truthfulness of Mordecai and Esther.

As a result of the report’s verification, both conspirators **were hanged on the gallows**. The English translation gallows refers to the platform on which an individual was hanged. The Hebrew term literally means “tree.” Thus biblical scholars have suggested that “tree” should be understood in the sense of a stake. The Persians commonly executed individuals by impaling them.

The biblical writer noted that **this event was recorded in the Historical Record**. The Hebrew phrase is literally “book of the matters of the days.” Kings in ancient times kept official court records of events that occurred during their reigns. This seemingly mundane statement regarding the record of an assassination plot will later have tremendous impact on events in the Book of Esther. ◀

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## Esther 3:1-6

- 1 After all this took place, King Ahasuerus honored Haman, son of Hammedatha the Agagite. He promoted him in rank and gave him a higher position than all the other officials.
- 2 The entire royal staff at the King's Gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, because the king had commanded this to be done for him. But Mordecai would not bow down or pay homage.
- 3 The members of the royal staff at the King's Gate asked Mordecai, "Why are you disobeying the king's command?"
- 4 When they had warned him day after day and he still would not listen to them, they told Haman in order to see if Mordecai's actions would be tolerated, since he had told them he was a Jew.
- 5 When Haman saw that Mordecai was not bowing down or paying him homage, he was filled with rage.
- 6 And when he learned of Mordecai's ethnic identity, it seemed repugnant to Haman to do away with Mordecai alone. He planned to destroy all of Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout Ahasuerus's kingdom.

**4 ▶ Verse 1.** Mordecai's courage challenges us to stand for God in the face of those who oppose Him. Despite Mordecai's heroic act of saving the king's life by reporting an assassination plot against Ahasuerus, Mordecai received no honor for saving the king's life on this occasion.

In contrast chapter 3 begins with the notation that **King Ahasuerus honored Haman**. The Hebrew verb literally means "made great" or "magnified." In context, the word refers to making Haman great in importance, thus honoring him. The designation Haman signifies "magnificence." Perhaps that name contributed to his sense of self-importance. The biblical writer identified Haman as the **son of Hammedatha the Agagite**. The moniker Hammedatha means "given by the god." This name may suggest arrogance was a family trait. The term Agagite identifies Haman as a

**DISCUSS: Question #3**  
(PSG, p. 109): **What risks do we take when we speak up against wrongdoing?**

*(Alternate: What's more difficult for you—to speak up or to stay silent?)*

**TRANSITION:** "In the next verses we will review another incident in the life of Mordecai that will be a continuing refrain through the story."

## STUDY THE BIBLE Esther 3:1-6



20 minutes

**READ:** Read or ask a volunteer to read Esther 3:1-6.

**GUIDE:** Refer members to **DIGGING DEEPER** on **PSG page 109** to explain the term *Agagite* and the historical significance of the Amalekites.

**SUMMARIZE:** Use Bible

**Commentary** **4** on page 111 and this page to introduce Haman, a key character in the story, and provide explanation to the role his heritage may have played in this story.

**DISCUSS: Question #4 (PSG, p. 110): What were some possible motivations for Mordecai's refusal to bow?**

**GUIDE:** Refer group members to **PSG page 110** to provide possible reasons why Mordecai refused to bow to Haman:

- *Perhaps Mordecai refused to bow because he felt he'd be violating his worship of Yahweh to bow before anyone but God. But . . . To bow was an act of respect, not worship. And if Mordecai did serve in the king's court, he likely had bowed previously before Ahasuerus or royal officials.*
- *Perhaps Mordecai refused to bow because Haman was an Agagite. Scholars believe the Agagites were also called Amalekites, and the Amalekites had long been enemies of the Jews.*

descendant of the Amalekite King Agag (1 Sam. 15:7-33), who reigned over a longstanding enemy of the Israelites or Jews. Agagite most likely is synonymous with Amalekite.

The reference to Haman as the Agagite calls attention to the animosity that existed between the Israelites and the Amalekites. That hostility began when the Israelites fought Amalek in the desert following their exodus from Egypt (Ex. 17:8-16). At that time Moses stated that the Lord would be at war against Amalek for generations (v. 16). Agag reigned over the Amalekites at the same time Saul ruled the Israelites. The Lord directed King Saul, a Benjaminite and the son of Kish, to totally destroy the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:1-3). Although Saul failed to carry out the Lord's command, the Israelites defeated the Amalekites on that occasion and the prophet Samuel "hacked Agag to pieces" (v. 33). The fact Mordecai also was a Benjaminite and possibly a descendant of Kish (Esth. 2:5) sets the stage for the conflict in this story.

With his reference to the honoring of Haman, a descendant of the Agagite Hammedatha, the biblical writer may have been calling attention to a subtle play on names in the account. Mordecai, viewed as a "little man," received no immediate glory for his role in saving the king's life. In contrast, Haman, whose name indicates magnificence and self-importance, had by some means established himself as worthy of recognition and advancement in Ahasuerus's estimation. The end of the story, however, will reveal a dramatic reversal in the two men's positions.

Ahasuerus **promoted** Haman **in rank**. In the Hebrew this verb basically means "lifted up." The parallel phrase rendered **gave him a higher position** literally reads "set his throne above." The biblical writer used these two similar phrases to emphasize Haman's advancement or promotion. However, the writer did not specify the reason the king honored Haman in this manner. Kings delegated authority and required their subjects to honor the chosen officials. Societies normally functioned in this manner. King Ahasuerus, however, appeared too easily manipulated by his officials. ◀

**5 ▶ Verse 2.** Although all the king's servants **bowed down and paid homage** to Haman, Mordecai refused to do so. *Bowed down* can refer to bending in general or to bowing down in worship. Sometimes it specifically designates kneeling. The parallel term rendered *paid homage*, whose basic meaning also is "bowed down," commonly appears in the Old Testament in the sense of "worshiped."

Why did Mordecai refuse to bow to Haman? The biblical writer did not specify the reason. Subjects commonly bowed before royalty in the Persian court. Such action demonstrated respect or submission to authority. Neither Scripture nor cultural custom forbade a Jew from bowing to an authority figure. Jews did not perceive such bowing down as a violation of the Second Commandment. Furthermore, Mordecai must have duly honored the king since he later became a leading official in Haman's place (Esth. 8:1-2).

Perhaps the reason Mordecai refused to bow to Haman relates to the longstanding animosity between the Amalekites and the Israelites. No self-respecting Benjaminite would bow to a man who had descended from the ancient Amalekite enemy of God's people. Thus Mordecai stood up rather than bowed down. Other biblical scholars connect Mordecai's refusal with his religious convictions. These scholars hold that at least in this instance bowing to Haman bordered on recognizing him as divine. Perhaps Mordecai had political and religious reasons for his refusal to honor Haman. ◀

**6 ▶ Verse 3.** Royal officials expressed their concern over Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman. They questioned him, **"Why are you disobeying the king's command?"** These royal staff members perceived Mordecai's refusal as disobedience to the king's directive. To them the issue was not that of honoring Haman but rather of obeying Ahasuerus. However, Mordecai likely would not have eventually risen to the royal position of second in command if he had refused to appropriately honor the king. The verb translated *are ... disobeying* literally means "to pass over." The term came to be used in the sense of violating an order or breaking a law. It appears in Scripture with the spiritual sense of breaking God's law or His covenant.

**The members of the royal staff** literally means "the king's servants who (were) in the king's gate." The term translated *servants* also means "slaves." The fact they were identified as servants emphasizes their subjectivity to the king. Thus they typically would not have felt free to express disagreement with the king's orders.

**Verse 4.** The royal staff repeatedly **warned** Mordecai regarding the consequences of his refusal to pay homage to Haman. The verb appears with various shades of meaning in the Old Testament, including "said," "uttered," "promised," and "commanded," depending on its context. The context of Esther 3:4 justifies the translation. Peer pressure, however, failed to change Mordecai's behavior. He resolutely refused to bow to Haman **day after day**.

**SUMMARIZE:** Use **Bible**

**Commentary 5** on page 112 and this page to provide more background information as to why Mordecai refused to bow to Haman.

**SUMMARIZE:** Use **Bible**

**Commentary 6** on this page and page 114 to show how others responded to Mordecai:

- *The questioned why he was disobeying the king's decree.*
- *They warned him.*
- *They told Haman to see how he would respond.*
- *They revealed to Haman that Mordecai was a Jew.*

**OPTIONAL ACTIVITY:**

Lead the group to share headlines and news events that demonstrate that evil is a reality in our world today. Who are the "Hamans" in our world? How can we stand against them? List contemporary individuals or groups who have stood against evil, no matter the costs.

**GUIDE:** Refer group members to **PSG page 111** to the following paragraph and ask someone to read these words:

*Mordecai had instructed Esther to keep her Jewish background secret, yet Mordecai did not keep his own heritage silent. The royal officials knew Mordecai was Jewish because "he had told them he was a Jew!"*

**SUMMARIZE:** Use **Bible Commentary 7** on this page and page 115 to show how Haman reacted to Mordecai's unwillingness to bow in his presence.

**OPTIONAL ACTIVITY:** Describe the ripple effect that occurs when you toss a rock into a pond or lake. Discuss how the principle of the ripple effect plays out in life situations and the impact one small action can have. We can't know the end results of our actions.

That Mordecai **would not listen to** the officials conveys in the original language the meaning that he would not obey. The Hebrew verb basically means "to hear." It also can carry the connotations of listening or obeying. We use the verb "to hear" in similar fashion in the English language. When my mother said to me as a child, "Do you hear me?" she was not questioning my auditory capability. Rather, she meant that I had better obey her. Mordecai kept refusing to obey the royal staff when they prompted him to bow to Haman.

The royal officials next took further action. They informed Haman of Mordecai's refusal **to see if Mordecai's actions would be tolerated**. At this point Haman apparently had not yet observed Mordecai's conduct. Once the officials brought it to Haman's attention, however, Mordecai's refusal to bow became a test case. Perhaps Haman had instructed his royal staff members to watch Mordecai's actions closely. This verse indicates Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman issued from the fact that **he was a Jew**. Mordecai declined to humble himself before a member of a people group that had opposed God's people for centuries. ◀

In much of the Old Testament period God's people are designated the people of Israel or the Israelites. Sometimes they are also called Hebrews. When and where then did the term *Jew* originate? The term *Jew* ultimately derives from the tribe of Judah, and the word originally referred to members of this tribe. When the Assyrians defeated the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 BC, they deported the majority of the population of those 10 tribes and brought people from other lands into this territory. Thus the identity of these Israelites was lost through assimilation with other peoples. As a result the vast majority of God's people who survived into the exilic period were those from the Southern Kingdom of Judah, hence they were labeled *Jews*. This designation also included the few who survived from the tribe of Benjamin, such as Mordecai.

**7▶ Verse 5.** Mordecai refused to bow to Haman or pay him homage. The verbs translated **bowing down** and **paying ... homage** also appeared in Esther 3:2 to describe the royal staff's recognition of Haman's position of authority. When Haman learned Mordecai had failed to give him the honor he felt he was due, Haman **was filled with rage**. In this context the verb suggests that Haman allowed his anger to control him. Anger not only can destroy others, but also can destroy us. Thus the apostle Paul counseled believers to "be angry and

do not sin” (Eph. 4:26). Haman possessed a self-centered anger that literally proved self-destructive in the end.

Haman’s anger is depicted with a term that comes from a root word meaning “to be hot.” The noun typically conveys the sense of an inner, emotional heat. This emotional heat can rise to varying degrees of intensity as communicated by differing translations of the noun, including: “hot displeasure,” “indignation,” “wrath,” “rage,” or “fury.” Haman’s anger with Mordecai had reached a high degree of intensity. ◀

**8 ▶ Verse 6.** Haman’s rage knew no bounds. Once **he learned of Mordecai’s ethnic identity**, Haman wrathfully determined not only to get rid of Mordecai, but also to destroy all the Jews under Ahasuerus’s rule. The Hebrew verb in the expression **it seemed repugnant** also means “to despise” or “to hold in contempt.” It conveys the basic essence of undervaluing or according little value to something or someone. Haman’s contempt for the Lord’s people revealed his contempt for the Lord as well.

Ironically, Haman determined to succeed in a way that King Saul had failed. The Lord had commanded Saul to completely destroy the Amalekites. The disobedient king, however, spared the Amalekite King Agag and the best of the Amalekites’ possessions (1 Sam. 15:2-3,9). Had Saul obeyed the Lord, the Amalekites, the group to which Haman belonged, would have been wiped out. This fact reminds us that not only the current generation but also later descendants can reap consequences of a leader’s failure to obey the Lord.

In contrast, Haman resolved to destroy **all ... the Jews** in the kingdom. Haman’s lust for power motivated him to plot genocide. The Hebrew term rendered Jews can literally be transliterated as Jehudim. The word for Judah is literally written in English as Jehudah. Thus the connection between the designation for the Southern Kingdom and the term that came to be used for God’s people is more obvious in the original language.

The main plot of the book comes to the forefront in Esther 3:6. Here the reader begins to understand why God has brought Esther to the royal position of queen. That the Jew Mordecai stood with conviction and refused to bow to Haman enraged this arrogant official. His quest for control resulted in his hatred not only of Mordecai but also of all who shared Mordecai’s ethnic identity. Thus Haman determined to destroy all the Jews. That Esther also was a Jew, a fact of which Haman was unaware at the time, would eventually result in his downfall. Haman would discover his plot could not contend with the sovereign power of God. ◀

**SUMMARIZE:** Use **Bible**

**Commentary 8** to show Haman’s hatred for the Jews and his resolve to destroy not only Mordecai, but all the Jews.

**GUIDE:** Refer members to the following on **PSG page 112:**

- *Standing up for someone facing discrimination could cost us some friendships, but it’s the right thing to do.*
- *Refusing to cheat a client or customer could cost our jobs, but it’s the right thing to do.*
- *Letting every kid who signed up for the team—even the worst players—get in the game could cost us the win, but it’s the right thing to do.*

**DISCUSS:** **Question #5 (PSG, p. 112): Why is it important to do the right thing in private and in public?**

*(Alternate: How do we determine when to take a stand?)*

**DO:** Encourage group members to take a few minutes to complete the activity **“One Is More Than None”** on **PSG page 112.**

**LIVE IT OUT****5 minutes**

**GUIDE:** Emphasize **The Point:** **It's always right to do the right thing.**

**REVIEW:** Review **Live It Out (PSG, p. 113)**; (see text to the right). Encourage each group member to follow through this week with at least one of the applications.

**WRAP IT UP**

**GUIDE:** Ask group members to consider situations in their lives where they may need to take a stand for what is right. It could be a current reality or a future possibility. Encourage group members to be spiritually prepared at all times to do the right thing, no matter the cost.

**PRAY:** "Father, give us the courage to take a stand for what is right. Prepare us for actions we may need to take now and in the future."

**LIVE IT OUT**

Throughout your life there have been occasions when you stood up for what was right. How will you stand with conviction this week?

- ▶ **Pray.** Pray for the courage to do the right thing in small ways when the opportunity is presented in your family, your neighborhood, and in your church.
- ▶ **Listen.** Listen for ways you can use your gifts, talents, and resources to do something meaningful to help the vulnerable around you.
- ▶ **Minister.** Find ways you can help do justice and mercy on behalf of the voiceless.



BIBLICAL  
**ILLUSTRATOR**



Silver bowl with gilded silver overlay, Achaemenjan; dates to 5th century BC.

The Persian Empire ranks among the great empires of the ancient world. The Books of 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Esther, Ezekiel, and Daniel refer to the Persian Empire. Most readers of the Old Testament recognize the names of the Persian kings such as Darius, Artaxerxes, and especially Cyrus. The Persian Empire under the leadership of Cyrus II, the Great (559–530 BC) expanded rapidly in every direction during his reign.

In the Old Testament world, “Persia” referred to a country laying to the east of modern-day Iraq, in the region of Iran. The Persian Empire covered a

vast area from the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers to India and into central Asia. At the height of power, Persia included territories currently found in Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Syria, Turkey, Russia, Iraq, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

The Persian Empire began with the victories of Cyrus II over Babylon in 539 BC. Daniel’s account of the “handwriting on the wall” tells of the night when Cyrus’s army entered Babylon, killing King Belshazzar (5:1-30). Cyrus’s conquering of the Babylonians in 539 BC raised Persia to the position of a world empire. What ultimately led to the disintegration of the Persian Empire began during the reign of Artaxerxes II (404–358 BC). Civil war within compounded by external issues led to the collapse of the Empire. The Persian Empire ended when defeated by the Greeks under Alexander the Great in 332 BC, ushering in the Hellenistic age.

The excerpt above is from the article “The Persian Empire” (Winter 2006-07), which relates to this session. More *Biblical Illustrator* articles are available that relate to this session. See page 7 about *Biblical Illustrator*.

## SHARING THE GOOD NEWS

***Many people believe that doing the right things will get them into heaven. The only right thing to do that will gain us entrance into heaven is confessing Jesus as Lord.***

Each week, make yourself available either before or after the session to speak privately with anyone in your group who wants to know more about becoming a Christian. See the article, “Leading Someone to the Greatest Decision of All,” on page 2 for guidance in leading a person to Christ.

Remind group members that **page 2** in the **PSG** offers guidance in how to become a Christian. Encourage believers to consider using this article as they have opportunities to lead others to Christ.

**GROUPS  
MATTER.**

Grow with other group leaders at the [Groups Ministry blog](#).

[LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry](http://LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry)