



## SESSION 2

# STAND WITH CONVICTION

### ***The Point***

It's always right to do the right thing.

### ***The Passage***

Esther 2:21–3:6

### ***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 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.

## What does the Bible say?

**The King's Gate** (2:21)—This was an assembling point for officials in the Persian court. In Susa this gate was a huge structure measuring 131 feet by 92 feet.

**Agagite** (3:1)—An Agagite was a descendant from the Amalekite King Agag (1 Samuel 15:7-33). Enmity between Israelites and Amalekites may explain Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman.

### **Esther 2:21–3:6 (CSB)**

<sup>2:21</sup> **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.**

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

<sup>23</sup> **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.**

<sup>3:1</sup> **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.**

<sup>2</sup> **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.**

<sup>3</sup> **The members of the royal staff at the King's Gate asked Mordecai, "Why are you disobeying the king's command?"**

<sup>4</sup> **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.**

<sup>5</sup> **When Haman saw that Mordecai was not bowing down or paying him homage, he was filled with rage.**

<sup>6</sup> **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.**





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## **Esther 2:21-23 Commentary**

**Verse 21:** Verse 21 introduces an element that at first glance appears parenthetical or secondary in the unfolding drama of Esther. Later in the story, however, this event will possess great significance. The focus shifts from Esther to Mordecai. In Session 1 we discovered “Mordecai” means “little man.” Mordecai’s action recorded in Esther 2:21-23 reveals him as anything but little in his ethical behavior. On one occasion when Mordecai was at the King’s Gate, he learned of a plot against King Ahasuerus.

**Verse 22:** How did Mordecai learn of the plot against King Ahasuerus? The biblical writer did not specify. 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. In any case, Mordecai possessed some access to the queen as well as to others within the palace complex. The term translated “plot” can convey a wide range of meanings, including “word,” “speech,” “thing,” “matter,” “act,” “event,” “account,” and “reason.” Translators rendered the word at least 80 different ways in the King James Version. When he learned of the conspiracy, Mordecai “reported” it to Esther.

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.

**Verse 23:** Esther’s report regarding the assassination plot was investigated and verified. 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.

Almost in passing the biblical writer noted that “this event was recorded in the Historical Record.” The Hebrew phrase translated “Historical Record” literally is “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.



# STUDY THE BIBLE

## Notes

### **Esther 3:1-6 (CSB)**

**<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> The members of the royal staff at the King's Gate asked Mordecai, "Why are you disobeying the king's command?" <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> When Haman saw that Mordecai was not bowing down or paying him homage, he was filled with rage. <sup>6</sup> 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.**

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Esther 3:1-4.

**SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 93):** Up until this point, we've heard nothing about Haman. Scripture tells us that King Ahasuerus chose to honor Haman and promote him to a high position.

- » Apparently he was already a trusted figure in the Persian government, but now he was second only to the king. The reason for this honor and promotion is not known.
- » With this honor came the king's command for all the royal officials to acknowledge Haman's position by bowing to him.
- » Mordecai, however, refused to bow to Haman. It should be noted that it wasn't a violation of the law of God to bow before kings and rulers; in fact, bowing was customary (Genesis 33:3). To bow was an act of respect, not worship. And if Mordecai indeed served in the King's court, it was likely that he had previously bowed before the king or other royal officials.
- » It's possible that Mordecai refused to bow because Haman was an Agagite. Scholars believe the Agagites were also called Amalekites, and the Amalekites had opposed God's people for centuries. This reason seems the most probable. We do know Mordecai's refusal to bow was an act of conscience.

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## ***Esther 3:1-6 Commentary***

**Verse 1:** Despite Mordecai's heroic act of saving the king's life by reporting an assassination plot against Ahasuerus, Mordecai received no honor on this occasion. In contrast, chapter 3 begins with the notation that King Ahasuerus honored Haman and promoted him in rank, though the reason for this honor and promotion is not known.

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 term "Agagite" identifies Haman as a descendant of the Amalekite King Agag (1 Samuel 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 (Exodus 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 Samuel 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 a descendant of Kish (Esther 2:5) sets the stage for Haman's defeat and demise.

**Verse 2:** Although all the king's servants "bowed down and paid homage" to Haman, Mordecai refused to do so. Perhaps the reason Mordecai refused to bow to Haman relates to the longstanding animosity that existed 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 both political and religious reasons for his refusal to honor Haman.

**Verse 3:** Royal officials expressed their concern over Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman. They questioned Mordecai, "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.



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### ***Esther 3:1-6 Commentary*** (Continued)

**Verse 4:** The royal staff repeatedly warned Mordecai regarding the consequences of his refusal to pay homage to Haman. Peer pressure, however, failed to change Mordecai's behavior. He resolutely refused to bow to Haman day after day. That Mordecai would not listen to the officials conveys in the original language the meaning that he would not obey. 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.

**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 about Mordecai's failure to give Haman the honor to which he felt entitled, Haman "was filled with rage."

**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. Haman resolved to destroy all the Jews in the kingdom. Haman's lust for power motivated him to plot genocide.

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.



5 minutes

# LIVE IT OUT

Notes

**GOD'S PEOPLE IN CAPTIVITY**

931 BC The nation of Israel is divided into the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah).

734-722 BC The Assyrian Empire conquers the Northern Kingdom (Israel). After the final battle in 722, many Jews from Israel were taken back to Assyria as captives.

605-586 BC The Babylonian Empire conquers the Southern Kingdom (Judah) in three separate stages, each time taking captives from Judah to Babylon. The final stage in 586 included the destruction of Jerusalem and the razing of Solomon's temple.

539 BC Under King Cyrus, the Medo-Persian army sacks the city of Babylon without a battle by diverting the Euphrates River. This marks the end of the Babylonian Empire.

538 BC Cyrus issues a decree allowing Jewish captives in Babylon to return home.

483 BC After a 100-day quarry, King Xerxes of Persia deposes his queen, Vashti, for refusing to "entertain" his guests.

479 BC Esther becomes queen of the Persian Empire.

474 BC Queen Esther and Mordecai stop Haman's plot to kill all of the Jews living in the Persian Empire.

473 BC The Jewish people celebrate the Feast of Purim for the first time.

458-445 BC The walls and temple are rebuilt in Jerusalem under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah.

**LEADER PACK:** In advance, make enough copies of **Pack Item #9**, "God's People in Captivity" handout, for each group member to have one. Distribute these and briefly summarize the events that have taken place in your study so far. Share that Esther's story is one with far-reaching consequences for God's people.



**SAY:** "How will you stand with conviction this week?"

**GUIDE:** Lead group members to consider the responses to the Bible study listed on page 96 of the PSG.

- » **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. Pray and organize some options for doing so this week.
- » **Act.** Check out [OneLifeMatters.org](http://OneLifeMatters.org) to find out ways you can be an advocate for others. As a group, choose a project and create a plan to get engaged.

## Wrap It Up

**SAY:** "Just like Mordecai, we have options when we're confronted with injustice. Seek the Lord's guidance and stand with conviction when the opportunity arises. **We can't fix every injustice we see, but we are called to step in where we can.**"

**GROUPS  
MATTER.**

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