

Esther – Learning from Imperfect People

Matthew Vander Els • 2018-02-20 • foundedintruth.com

MAIN VERSES

[Esther 1](#) • [Esther 2](#) • [Esther 3](#) • [Daniel 1](#) • [Ezra 1](#) • [Nehemiah 1](#) • [Isaiah 40](#) • [Isaiah 46](#) • [Matthew 11](#) • [Colossians 2:9](#) • [Jeremiah 23:6](#) • [2 Samuel 16:5](#) • [1 Samuel 13](#) • [1 Samuel 15](#)

Do you ever find yourself searching for something bigger than you? For a community to be a part of? A place founded on truth and love. A place to worship the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, and the Son of God. Welcome to Founded in Truth, where we're more than just a fellowship. We're a family. So welcome home.

A Book That Challenges Our Expectations

Hey, look at that. So we're continuing through this series that, to be honest, I thought would be kind of a short series, and it is. Because I was hoping when we started it that, hey, we can surely get through the book of Esther in three weeks and end with Purim. And that would be great, and that would be perfect, and we will be doing that. But as you saw last week, we got one chapter in, and there's a lot there. There's a lot of things that maybe we've never seen before. And when we read the reality of God's Word, sometimes it crashes our expectations or our opinions or the molds that we want to put over God's Word to make it our Word, to make it what we want to read.

And Esther is a great book to do that. Esther is a book full of irony and a little bit of humor, but a lot of complexity. And you think the story is going one way, but then it's not, but then it does, but then, whoa, where did that come from?

Xerxes: Supreme Power Without Righteousness

And last week we started discussing one character of the book of Esther, and that was Xerxes, the king of Persia. And we kind of discussed how in the lovely movie, which was a great, fantastic, family-friendly attempt at making Esther a production, we have this Jesus-looking

fellow as the king of Persia, and this is a guy I would like my daughter to date. He's nice, well-off, seems to be real smart. This is not the biblical character of Xerxes.

Xerxes dominated the world in the 5th century BCE with supreme power, supreme wealth, supreme arrogance, and all he wanted was supreme glory. And he was sick, and he was twisted, and he was just a nasty human being, as we saw just in chapter 1. He was not honorable. He was corrupt and all he sought was glory. And he was the kind of person that would use his power to give you anything that your flesh would desire as long as you submitted to him, as long as you gave him the glory, as long as you said, "You are my king." He would provide it.

Vashti's Refusal

And he attempted to exploit and abuse the role of his wife, Vashti, by bringing her before a whole bunch of drunk men to show her off. "Hey guys, you want to see something? You've seen everything that I have. You've seen the golden solo cups, all-you-can-drink open bar with royal wine, a couch made of gold. You want to see something else? I can top it all. I can top it all. I got the most beautiful wife. You want to see my wife? You want to see her, right? Tell Vashti to come in here with only her crown on." Jewish commentary states that he wanted her to show up only with her crown. Either way, he wanted to abuse and exploit her role as his wife. And in my opinion, she stood on a foundation of dignity when she refused. And she said, "No, I will not come." And he says, "What do I do now? I will make a decree that she shall never see me again." I'm sure she's woe-ing over that. Whoa. Right?

A King Seeking Counsel

And we know that from this point, Herodotus, a Greek historian, states that this was most likely before he went to Greece to war. And that's speculation, but we know the king lost to the Greeks—300. And then he'd really messed up because he'd lost his wife, he'd lost a war, he'd lost his companion. And how's he going to get her back? And what could the king do to ever be reconciled to his wife? Better not to be in that position at all, right guys? And so he asks all the young men who aren't married, "Guys, what should I do?" "Have a competition. You should have all the virgins come in, brought to you one by one. You get one night with each one of them. Talk to them, have relations with them, have fun, send them off in the morning. And then you choose whichever one you like the best out of all of them."

Guys, maybe you were not influenced by media and this wasn't pushed on you, but is this not the same thing that's taught today? "How do I find a wife? You go and you try them all out,

whichever one pleases you." The corruptness never changes.

Meeting Esther and Mordecai

And so we're going to be picking up in Esther chapter 2 today, and we're going to try to cover a lot of ground. We'll see, I hope. And we're going to look at the protagonists of the story. We're going to look at Esther and Mordecai. They're about to be introduced to us. And these are two Judeans that live in the capital city of Susa in this pagan land. And so you have Babylon. So here's Israel. You have Babylon here. And then Susa is like way over here. It's even farther away from Israel than Babylon was.

And these individuals will not be perfect, we will find. They don't seem to be zealous for God's Torah, at least like Daniel or Ezra. They have completely assimilated into this pagan culture. They even have Babylonian names. And so if you join me in Esther chapter 2, verse 5. Hey, Jason, or maybe Max, can you drop me down one of those little packages? I forgot to grab one of those. And can someone run up there and catch that and bring it to me? Who's going to do it? Oh, Katie's going to do it. Okay, great.

So Esther chapter 2, verse 5. Here we go. And I'll let you, if you brought your scriptures, please turn there with me. I don't have slides for all the scriptures we're going to read today, so bringing the Bible is definitely a good thing—B-Y-O-B.

"Now, there was at the citadel a Jew whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish. The son of who? Kish, a Benjamite, who had been taken into exile from Jerusalem with the captives."

Thank you.

The Lineage of Mordecai

Now, we've done it. We finally got to the two main characters of the story that really this whole world revolves around through the rest of the book. And at first glance, when we look at their introductions, we can learn a lot about them. The author intentionally just shoves a lot of details into the book here.

Number one, Mordecai. How is Mordecai introduced? A Jewish man. So we know he's from Judea. That's what Jew stands for—Jew, Jewish. Means that they're from Judea, the land of Judea. The son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite. So he's from the tribe of

Benjamin, and you can see his genealogy going back. This helps us understand where he comes from.

Great! So now we can find out his lineage, his heritage. We can kind of size them up a little bit. Like, where is this guy from, right? What kind of family is he from? Where does he come from?

A Story Layered with Irony

And so the book of Esther is full of irony. So Jonah was really full of humor, and you never knew that until you read it and kind of went through it, and it's like, oh, that's funny. Oh, look at that. That's funny. Esther is like that, but with irony.

For example, the king decrees that men need to be the masters of their own homes, and then selects Esther to be his wife, and for the rest of the book, Esther is telling him what to do. I mean, it's like, this is ironic. You have Judeans, the people of God, named after Babylonian gods. Well, that's not right, but okay. You have eunuchs who tried to kill the king who castrated them. Yeah, okay, I mean, of course, you know. You have Haman that makes gallows but ends up being hung on them. The Jews end up fighting, this small minority of people end up fighting this massive, outnumbering army of unknown enemies.

You have an Agagite facing off with the Jew, and then the tables are turned on the Agagite. And then the Jew takes the position of the Agagite. You have an Agagite that decrees something to the entire land. And then the Jewish man, who is the good guy, the hero, now in the position of the Agagite, decrees a decree that is eerily similar to the Agagite to begin with. And so the story is rich. This isn't just some story. It has intention built into it. It has history in it. It's beautiful. It's a beautiful piece of literature that we have in the library called our Bibles.

The Benjamite Connection

And so, Mordecai is a Benjamite. Now, which king of the united monarchy of Israel—when Israel had all 12 tribes united—was from the tribe of Benjamin? And it's funny because I hear people talk about like, "Oh, the one day all 12 tribes are going to be united and that's when everything is going to be made perfect and everything." And you go back to scripture when all 12 tribes are united and there's like a little flash of light, like a match. Woo, yeah, this is great. And then the dark ages of Israel before they split.

So who was the king during this time from the tribe of Benjamin? And there was a prize at stake. This is an authentic Founded in Truth pop socket. Saul. Saul. You got a pop socket. There

you go. Oh, there you go. I just got those. So there you go. You can put that in your phone. It's a stand. It's all kinds of cool stuff. So, yay, someone's paying attention. I love it.

Saul was a Benjamite. And Saul was a great guy, right? For about three years, yeah. That's it. Rest of his life, horrible king. Just boo. But not so much. Do you know what Saul's father's name was?

Kish, son of Kish. A man by the name of Shemi in [2 Samuel 16](#), 5 states that he comes from the house of Saul as well. And so there is a little bit of debate here about the author's intention. I believe it's historical, but there's debate on if it's intentional to put him with Saul or if it's really his historical lineage. It's irrelevant because what the author is saying is that Mordecai is connected to King Saul. So if Mordecai was connected to like King David or Aaron the high priest or Moses, we'd all be like, yeah, right? All right, good guy. Saul, king of Israel, first king of Israel, did okay for the first couple years, didn't do okay the rest—very unwise king, kind of flip-flopped. That doesn't help us define who Mordecai is quite yet. And what does verse 6 say? Still with the introduction of Mordecai: who had been taken into exile, his family from Jerusalem with the captives who had been exiled by Jeconiah, the king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had exiled. This is intentionally put here. It's supposed to cause the reader to remember: oh yeah, there was an exile. The people did not obey, so they were exiled from Jerusalem, from the presence of God, intentionally. Away from the temple, away from everything. So these are people that are a couple generations removed from the disobedient. This is how Mordecai is introduced to us. So I want you guys to take what you know about Mordecai right here, and we're going to put him up here, and we're going to stick a pin in it. Just kind of hold that there for a moment.

The Exile and God's Charge

And for those of you who don't know or aren't familiar, Nebuchadnezzar was the king of Babylon, and he came. He was basically orchestrated by God to go in and take the southern kingdom of Israel captive and exile them away from God's presence at the temple. The reason why is because they were disobedient. This is what the whole book of Daniel is about. And then there was a king who did not worship God, who came up, but he thought that no men should be slaves. And this man was Cyrus, king of Persia, and he overtook Babylon, and he freed the Judeans and said, okay, guys, you can go back home. You're free. Go back home, and you can build your temple. And this is what the books of Ezra and Nehemiah are about. And this is the land that was ordained to them since the time of Abraham. So this is kind of a big deal. This is

their homeland, literally viewed as the place where God dwells. Did everybody move back? No. No. Some stayed in Iran, obviously, and Persia.

The Prophecies and What Didn't Happen

Now the question comes up, and there's a lot of debate: were they supposed to? Well, [Isaiah 40](#) through 46 speaks about the prophecies. And the prophecies in the latter part of Isaiah, specifically here, and the rest of the end of Isaiah, talk about the time when the exile will end and all of Israel will return back to the land of Israel. God will redeem them and rescue them, and they will be free to return back to the land of Israel. And this is going to prompt this age of restoration of the kingdom, and this age of a new creation, and where this Edenic setting is going to sprout out when they return from Babylon. And so a lot of people would say, yeah, they were supposed to return back, because the prophecies say that, but it didn't happen. And what's further interesting is many of the prophecies in the latter part of Isaiah seem like they should have happened during this time period, but they never did.

And this prompted—since the time of the return of exile on through the first century—this notion that we know a Redeemer is coming. We know a king is coming and he's going to lead us completely out of exile, even exile within our own land. Because when Nehemia and Ezra got back to their land, even they said, we still seem like slaves in our own land. We still don't have what we had or what is promised for us to have as far as this communion with God. When will it come? And what's amazing is which prophet did Yeshua seem to quote the most from? Isaiah. And when John doubted Yeshua, when he was in prison, what verse did Yeshua send? What chapter, what prophet did Yeshua send back? And said, don't you know? He quoted Isaiah. The blind will see, the lame will walk. Quoting Isaiah. And at the end of that chapter of Isaiah, it talks about the captives will be set free and return home. Isaiah. Yeshua quotes Isaiah as if he's fulfilling those prophecies. I'm getting ahead of myself because we'll be going over this probably in the next series about what the gospel was all about and why it was contagious in the first century and why it's still contagious and what the weight behind it is. Guys, Yeshua came to fulfill these prophecies. The exile was ended in Yeshua. He brought us back to God. There is no greater exodus than that from sin. We are no longer slaves from sin and death. Forget Persia. Forget Egypt. Just like [Jeremiah 23](#) speaks about the branch from David that's going to come. And when the followers of this king see him, they're going to praise God and they're going to say, no longer shall we call him the God that freed us from Egypt. This is the God that brought us home. That's us. That's us.

Back to Mordecai

Get back on subject, Matthew. I apologize. And so the Judeans are free to return home, as we said, and many of them didn't. They were very happy in Persia. And Mordecai's family stays. Not saying Mordecai is this evil, rebellious person, but this is the context of the story we're reading. So everyone caught up? We're good? We're good? Fantastic.

The Beauty of Esther

Verse 7: He was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had no father or mother. Now the young lady was beautiful in form and face. And when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter. Many people have watched the movie One Night with the King. Again, I love the movie. It's fantastic. Very family-friendly, which the book of Esther really isn't. And in the movie, if I'm not mistaken, Mordecai tells Hadassah, he's like, now, you're about to go to the king's palace, you're about to go to the harem, and don't call yourself Hadassah anymore, you need to change your name to Esther. This is not what the script says, the text says. Her name was Hadassah, that is Esther. Her name was Esther, that is Hadassah. She had two names. She had her Hebrew name and equally she had her pagan name. And we could talk about an identity crisis here if we wanted to, but that's who she is.

And it's fascinating because it goes on and describes her beauty. And it basically just says that she's just gorgeous. Not just her body, but her face too. Not just her face, but her body too. Like every ounce of her is just gorgeous. And when the king's order and his edict were proclaimed, and when many young women were gathered in Susa, the citadel, in custody of Haggai, Esther was also taken into the king's palace and put in custody of Haggai, who had been in charge of the women. And the young woman pleased him and won his favor, and he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and her portion of food, with the seven chosen young women from the king's palace, and advanced her and her young women to the best place in the harem.

The Life She's Entering

So here we go. Here it is. Here's Esther. This is the character of the book. This is who the book is named after right here. And when all the women were brought into the harem, I want to kind of put a context on this. This was not simply a vacation. We know what's going to happen to them. They're in line, right? The bachelor of Persia. They're in line to spend one night with the king. And they don't just go home if they're not chosen. They stay. This is their home for the rest of their lives. They become concubines to the king. Concubine is like a wife, but it's like a

second wife. On the rank of wives, it's down here. You're not queen, but you're concubine. You're the king's property, if you will. And this is what's going on here. So all these girls are coming in. This is the rest of their life. The rest of their life, they'll be pampered. They'll be in this harem with all these other sister wives, I guess you could say. They get their food. All these eunuchs are going to make sure they stay pretty. And maybe one day the king will want some intimacy with them again. Maybe not. And she is in line to become a concubine and hopefully win this competition to become queen.

The Identities We Carry

And so we grow up—it's fascinating because we grow up with a variety of evolving identities in our lives. This is really impressed on me. When you're a baby, sometimes you're the baby that screams a lot, right? Was anyone that one? Sometimes, maybe. Sometimes you're the baby that does not eat their vegetables. Sometimes you're the baby that poops a lot, right? You have an identity given to you by who you are. As you grow, you might become the smart kid. You might become the adventurous kid. You might become the hyper kid. That was me. Or just hyper. You have identities that are constantly morphing and evolving throughout your life, what you're known to be, who you are proclaimed to be to the world. And when you're a teenager, man, you have identities that are given to you by your parents, and they're involved. They evolve based on your interest. And unfortunately, a majority of the pressure of who you are comes from your peers when you're a teenager, which is awful, awful. And your perceived identity speaks to the world about who you are. Who you are. And here Mordecai advises Esther to keep her identity as a chosen people silent.

A Secret to Keep

To keep her identity as a seed of Abraham a secret. Esther, do not tell anybody that you're part of the people that declare the sovereign God of Abraham. No, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? No, you keep that to yourself. And I cannot help but think about us in that moment. What if we did this as believers? What if we did this as believers? Let me rephrase that. Do we do this as believers? Do you ever do that? In situations in your own life, do you ever encounter scenarios or circumstances or atmospheres where we remain silent? Do we intentionally hide our identity in Yeshua from other people? Because let me tell you, if you've experienced the spirit of the living God in your life, if you've proclaimed his kingdom as ruling, if you've proclaimed Yeshua as king, you can't help but shine for the king above all kings. You can't help

it. If you've felt the level and the power and the mercy and grace of the true living God, you can't.

See, [Colossians 2.9](#) is an awesome verse for many different reasons. For in Christ, all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form. That right there should send shockwaves through your life. Because there are so many people that will take Yeshua, and they love studying all kinds of different things in the Bible and different aspects of the Bible. And one thing that people love to do for some reason is they love to put walls and a mold around Yeshua. Right? Oh, Yeshua is the living Torah. That's a great one, and I hear that a lot. And I don't disagree with that, but it's when that sentence ends with a period that I start to go, what? What do you mean he's the living Torah, period? Like, that's it? Like, yeah, he's the walking, talking, living Torah. No, no, he's more than just a walking scroll. It never says that he is the nomos. It says that he is the logos. There's a huge difference there. He is the fullness of the deity living in bodily form. He's bigger than that. And that's a big deal. And that's also another sermon.

Verse 10, and in Christ, in Messiah, a king, you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. See, the pillar of our faith in the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, God of Israel, our faithful king, is that our faith is public. Our faith is public. That's what the gospel means. Gospel means a proclamation of good news. Oh, it's good news you had under a bush. It's good, you got the great paper, it's good news, and you just put it in the recycling bin. No, this is a proclamation. You're shouting this to the world by your speech, by your actions, by everything that you do. You are proclaiming your faith. Your faith is meant to be public. And we're called to be image bearers of the one true God. We're called to bear his image. Why? So that others may see it. We're called to be ambassadors, messengers, royal messengers of our king. And we're sent out as a means by which others will see and experience God's love and mercy and grace. Guys, that's the story of the Bible. That's the story throughout all of the Tanakh, of Israel not falling short — well, falling short of this vocation that's been given to them, to be the light unto all nations, to be the kingdom of priests. Fall short, fall short, fall short, fall short. Constant rejection of their vocation. Why do you think they were exiled? It's because they traded their vocation for sin.

Comfort Versus Christ

And when we conceal our relationship with Yeshua, guys, that's when we're unfaithful to him. We're unfaithful to the vocation that we were baptized into. And for so many, because of family dynamics, maybe friends, maybe politics, maybe income, maybe it's your job, maybe it's your social network, maybe it's whatever — your comfort and convenience sometimes trumps

Yeshua. This is what Mordecai is pushing on Esther. You don't tell them who we are. We don't do that. It's what it says. Keep it a secret. And we're taught to read the story and justify it. Like, oh, that's okay, it's a good thing, you know. It's like Abraham. Yeah, yeah, she's not my wife.

And I know people who have proclaimed and committed their lives to Yeshua but don't want it to be seen as a public thing. I know people who have had a renewed chapter in their life, in this spiritual experience of renewal, new creation, Holy Ghost moment in their life, and they don't want to go to the mikvah or get baptized because that's something people will see. Maybe if you're going through a time in your life where you need support, where you need prayer, where you need the support of your community here, you never go to the prayer team and say, hey, can I have prayer for this? You never reach out to one of the leadership. You never come up when we have prayer time here at the end of service. No, I don't want to do that, because it's a public thing. Someone might see you in your faith, walking out to deal with whatever it is, or this new revelation that you've had in your life. When you're surrounded by friends and coworkers who are bad-mouthing believers — any believers, those stupid Christians, or those stupid followers of Yeshua — and you turn your back and remain silent, you would rather worship comfort than the Christ, than the Messiah. And that's a real lesson that I believe is here for us today. And it's not an easy one to hear, because there's no doubt we've all been in a position where we've had to make that choice. Do I stand now? Do I proclaim this? I want people to know this about me. I get it. I get it.

And Mordecai and Esther are not these gung-ho religious people in the story that we see. It's just not there. That's not an attribute that the author is giving them at all. This is the picture that's being painted here. And suddenly these characters that we're reading about in the Bible reflect struggles and weaknesses that we may have in our own lives. And I love that, because now I can identify with them. I've never been in a lion's den, guys. Just me — it's kind of hard to identify with Daniel sometimes. Samson — Samson is not the best role model, but I've never had my eyes plucked out and been at a point where I'm going to bring this... I live in a pagan world now, and this pagan world impresses on me every single day: hide who you are. It's okay, hide who you are. And it's this decision that I have to make. Am I going to stand for God, or am I going to step into the world just a little bit more until who I was and who I was called to be disappears?

Esther Goes to the King

And so verse 12, we continue on. There we go. Now, when the turn came for each young woman to go in to King Ahasuerus, after being 12 months under regulations for the women,

since this was the regular period of beautifying — sometimes it doesn't take my wife longer to get ready than me, but it certainly does not take her 12 months, which I am thankful for, right? 12 months for the women to get ready for their experience and their encounter with the king. Six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and ointments for women. They smelt pretty — let's just leave it at that.

And when the young women went in to the king in this way, she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. And in the evening she would go in, and in the morning she would return, and she would go to the second harem, which was in the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch, who was in charge of the concubines. They go in one night, have a sexual experience with the king, and at this point, if you will, they're four of his concubines — married, if you will, right? She would not go in to the king again unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name.

And when the turn came for Esther, the daughter of Abihail, the uncle of Mordecai who had taken her as his own daughter, to go in to the king, she asked for nothing except for what Hegai, the king's eunuch, advised. Now Esther was winning favor in the eyes of all who saw her. She was becoming very popular. And when Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign, the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won grace and favor in his eyes more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

Then the king gave a great feast — he loves to party, we're going to talk about that a little bit next week, how many parties does the king end up having in the whole book — for all his officials and servants. And it was Esther's feast, right? A couple years now without a wife — this is a big deal, he finally chose one. He also granted a remission of taxes to the provinces and gave gifts with royal generosity. How many of you guys would attend that? I don't got to pay taxes and he's going to give me money?

Was She Trying to Impress the King?

Esther is now married to the pagan Persian king. This happened. This is it. Something that is widely condemned and discouraged throughout scripture, but it's part of this story. And it's kind of crazy — the reader is left wondering what is going on at this point in scripture. Was Esther actually trying to impress the pagan king? Was she? Did she want to win? I don't know — I mean, maybe I just want more deodorant and he won't choose me, you know? Like, hey, Hegai, what would be the best thing for me to do? Give me some insider trading here. What

should I wear? What should I take? What should I do? Give me some — is she just a pagan wannabe? Is she righteous at all? Her Hebrew name is only mentioned once in the entire book of Esther.

Esther, 55 times. What does that tell us? Is it bad? Is it good? Is she bad? Is she good? Is she going to stand for who she is and who she was always meant to be? Or is she not? Does she even think about these things? Or is she just going through life? Honest questions. Honest questions. Is she godly or not?

And I want you to keep an eye on something in the book because next week we're going to continue the book, but we're not going to read nearly as much as we have been. So I want you guys to go ahead and read through the book. I want you to keep an eye on something at this point in Scripture right here. How Esther begins to transition into a strong character throughout the book. See, before this, she's passive. She goes where she's told, she does what she's told to do, this, this, this, this. And from this point forward, she begins to assert herself. She begins to get bold and she determines what is just and what is right. Not perfectly, not perfectly, but she starts to progress into this new bold woman in the book. And it's fascinating to see how the author did that, recorded that. And once she realizes who she is, she stands. Once she remembers who she is, she ends up standing with boldness.

Remembering Our Identity

How many of us walk through life like this? How many of us today have forgotten who we are? How many of us today have forgotten our identity in Yeshua? Maybe we've been hiding it so long that, hey, you don't remember what it feels like to stand for something. We have no other identity worth standing for than who we are in Yeshua. This is what the scriptures are telling us. The world does not want you to stand for God. And you know this. When was the last time you guys woke up and said, God, today I will live for you? That's an honest question. When was the last time that you woke up and in your prayers, if you prayed in the morning, God, I want to live for you today. Despite what I want to do, despite my own agendas, despite my own wants and desires, give me the strength to remember who I am today.

God Is the Hero

This is a story about a God who works through imperfect people. God is the hero of this story. Spoiler alert. God is. Not Esther, not Mordecai. God is the hero of this story. A God that

transforms people. A God that rescues, a God that redeems. No matter how far away you are, you're not too far from him. And that's amazing for me.

And as the story progresses, we have Mordecai. Mordecai. In verse 19, if you have your scriptures. Now when the virgins were gathered together a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. Okay, Matt, why would that be the only verse you have in the slide? Why don't you underline that?

Mordecai at the King's Gate

Because the king's gate that they're speaking about here was discovered in the 1970s. And when we think of a gate, maybe some of us have a fence around our yard. Anyone have a fence? Anyone have a gate? You get a lawn chair and you sit at your gate. This gate was massive. It was more than 130 feet wide and 90 feet deep. Mordecai was not simply just kind of chilling out in a lawn chair at this king's gate. This was an official, official setting. More likely, Mordecai held a high-ranking business position here, maybe even a political position. He was there for a reason. This was a main hub for business in Persia, the king's gate. This is where you'd go, Wall Street here, right? Xenophon, another Greek historian, writes about this king's gate—this is where the officials of the king would sit. So maybe Mordecai was an official or a scribe of the king. He had some type of pretty decent—he wasn't this guy. He was up in rank.

Continuing in verse 20: "Esther had not made her kindred or her people known to anybody as Mordecai has commanded her, for Esther obeyed Mordecai just as when she was brought up by him." What'd they do? They got what? Angry. I wonder why.

The Foiled Assassination

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. And when the affair was investigated, it was found that the men were both hanged on gallows. And it was recorded in the book of the Chronicles in the presence of the king.

So guys, I want you to remember. Remember last week we talked about a eunuch. Because here we have two eunuchs. And these men were drafted into the king's court. It was kind of like a draft in the military. You're drafted into the king's court. And because they would be around the king and a lot of the king's women, property, they were made into eunuchs. And as we discussed, a eunuch is someone who used to be very happy and fulfilled in their life. A king would castrate you if you were drafted in here. This wasn't exactly like a volunteer form—yeah,

this sounds like a great job right here. They were drafted. They would draft the men in there, castrate them. And then we're left with this story of these secret servicemen of the king who are angry with the king. I wonder why, right? And we can only assume. And two of them want to kill the king. I get it. I would want that. Yeah, let's do this. I'd be totally on board with that.

Mordecai's Wisdom

But Mordecai overhears the plans. And Mordecai is loyal to the king. He's loyal. He's a loyal, loyal person to the king. So this is a good quality. And so he told Esther, and Esther told the king, and this launched an official investigation. He did this so wisely because he could have made a big stink about it. He could have gone over to the eunuchs and said, "Hey, we heard this about you." "No, not us. What are you talking about?" "All right, delay the assassination." No. They knew. He was smart. He said, Esther, this is going to happen. We don't know who all is involved. It could be local police, local guards, it could be the Federal Bureau of Guards, who knows how deep this conspiracy goes. We need to tell the king. And so they went to the back room, told the king directly, and they investigated it. Full out investigation, everything, wiretaps, the whole shebang, found the guys to be guilty, and put them on the gallows.

And when we think of gallows, we always think of a Western movie, right? Where you're sitting on a platform or like Robin Hood, on the stools and you got the ropes. No, this is not how they did things in Persia. So the word here kind of indicates a stick. And so many commentaries will assert it's a stick. Well, how do you kill someone with a stick? You put them on it. It's a kebab. It's an impalement. Throw them on the stick and you raise them up high.

The Severity of Death

And the thing about the stick is they could have either been killed by a stick or their dead bodies could have been hung on the stick. Both were equally bad. The reason being, remember we spoke about the afterlife? If you don't bury the body, it's disgraceful. It takes something from them in the afterlife. If they're put to shame in their death, the body's just left out to rot. It's a horrible thing.

Another opinion, which is very likely, and this is something I just recently learned, is that it could have been crucifixion as well. See, the Romans perfected crucifixion. Persians invented it. So it's just a little tidbit. They were either impaled or crucified. I don't know which one's worse, but it was bad. Either way, bad, right?

A Savior Overlooked

And so Mordecai saves the king. Is this a big deal? It's a pretty big deal, right? Recorded in the Chronicle of Foot. Good job, Mordecai. This is great. Very wise. He's smart about it. He's a good guy, right?

And then we go to chapter 3. And I'll cut off a little bit. It's okay. After these things... In verse 7, I believe it talks about that this is now in the seventh year of the king. So when all this other stuff happened, it was in the second year of the king. So when it says after all these things, what it should say is after five years since this happened, king Ahasuerus gave someone a promotion. Okay, okay. So this is good. So Mordecai saves the king's life. And after five years, he hasn't gotten a thing. King gift card to Walmart, nothing. No official record, nothing. Just written in the chronicle, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Haman's Rise

So king's about to give someone a promotion. This is going to be good. Finally, Mordecai is going to—no, the king promotes Haman, the Agagite. Agagite. Agagai. That's a fun word to say. I'm sorry. Agagai, the son of Hamadatha, and advanced him and set his throne, he gets his own throne, above all of the officials, which Xenophon says is who hung out at the king's gate. So above everybody that was under the king, and all of the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down to him and paid homage to Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai... No. Could you blame him? All right.

Now, what do we know about Haman? Haman's an Agagite. It's fascinating because Haman and the name of his father are Persian names. So the author specifically tells us about his heritage. He didn't have to. Persian guy who was also an Agagite.

The Amalekite Connection

And King Agag was an Amalekite. Remember that name from the Torah, from the wilderness journeys? The Amalekites were like a nomadic tribe that clashed with Israel quite a few times in the wilderness. And by the time that King Saul was reigning, we were talking about King Saul earlier, weren't we? Oh, what a coincidence. At the time King Saul was reigning, God gave King Saul the command to destroy all of the Amalekites, all of the Agagites, kill them all.

And so King Saul went to battle. God said, listen, when you go to battle, they're going to have lots of really cool sheep and goats and donkeys and all cool stuff and gold and stuff. Don't touch

any of it. Don't take any of it. Just destroy it. Stop it. No. Kill everybody. Don't touch their stuff. Nothing. So King Saul goes in. He kills everybody except for King Agag himself. So he leaves him alive. And Samuel comes and he hears all these animals singing. He's like, what is that? And he's like, oh, it's the spoils from the Amalekites.

What are you doing, King Saul? This is Prophet Samuel. Prophet Samuel, you just read [1 Samuel 13](#) through 15. You get an idea. I would get scared if King Samuel was in the same city as me. Just a very intimidating fellow. And Samuel looks at Saul and he's like, what are you doing? And he's like, yeah, I got King Agag too. Who do you have? The king of the Amalekites? Yeah, I left him alive.

So Samuel tells him two chapters earlier in [1 Samuel 13](#), Saul goes and proceeds to make sacrifices without Samuel. And Samuel condemns Saul. He says, listen, your lineage will never become king. That's been stripped of you. Learn your lesson. Get your act together. Come on. In chapter 15, he realizes that he completely disregards the command of God. And Samuel says, guess what? The kingship is now going to be taken from you. You've lost everything. It's going to be, kids, get out. It will no longer go to you, and it's definitely from you.

And then it says that Samuel killed King Agag. Now, Samuel did not just simply kill. One does not simply kill King Agag. Samuel, it says, chopped him into pieces. Does that disturb anyone else? I mean, I get it, yeah, he's a, I mean, once is enough, right? Chops him into pieces. Just, yeah, very over the top. Over, over, over the top.

Setting Up the Story

And so this is the last time that King Saul ever really encounters Samuel until the whole Endor thing. Samuel dies and everything, and they get the witch and all that. So Haman descends from Agag. He is an Agagite. He somehow descends from this guy, or the Amalekites. And who does Mordecai descend from? It's Haman, Saul. Oh, okay. So the author's setting us a story up here.

This is going to be good. And what's going to happen in this story? What do we want to happen? As the reader, we kind of want certain things to happen. We want Mordecai to go and chop Haman up like Saul was supposed to do to King Agag. No one else. Okay, just me. This is what I see in the story. The author's putting this together. This is going to be good.

Well, this is where the story gets interesting. Because remember how I say we want the story to go a certain way, and it hits some rocks along the path. The king decrees that everyone should bow before Haman. Who does? The king decrees you must bow to Haman. One more time.

Who does? Not Haman. This isn't Haman's thing. Maybe Haman's enjoying it, but this is the king's decree.

The King's Decree

And I found this really fascinating. Haman is, again, second in charge now. He has his own throne. He is high up. To prostrate before the king, to bow to him would be pretty standard. In fact, Herodotus reports this. Herodotus in Histories 134, in the first section, states how Persian culture works when you greet one another. And he says, when one man meets another on the road, it is easy to see if the two are equal. So if they have the same rank, if they're equals, they kiss each other on the mouth. Right? And if you're a little bit, if you know each other and you're close to rank, then you can kiss each other on the cheek. That's fine. Right? Right? But if your rank is humbler, if it is down lower, if you're a private and they're a captain, you've got to salute. And saluting in Persia is bowing down.

This is not something that's unique to Haman in Persian culture. This is protocol. The king established Haman in this position. As a result, guys, everyone is beneath him. You bow to him. I wanted to do a message about being equals and giving each other a holy kiss, like Paul says multiple times, but anyway.

So Haman's promoted. King acknowledges him per the custom of Egypt. And yeah, you kiss equal folk and you prostrate and bow to superiors to make sure you recognize their rank. And Mordecai refuses to do what? Not going to bow.

Two Interpretations

Now there are two interesting opinions here. And can we just be honest about the culture and the context of the Bible? I hope so. Okay, so number one, and this is traditionally what's thought to have taken place here. Number one, Mordecai refused to bow before Haman because of idolatry, because Haman is evil, and we reminisce about Daniel refusing to bow to the statue of Nebuchadnezzar, and Mordecai refused to bow before this idol of Haman. It doesn't say that, but that's an opinion, right? And later the Jewish commentaries actually assert that Haman carried an idol around with him so Mordecai wouldn't bow because of that. Again, they saw the same problem that we're fixing to see here and they were like, yeah, he had an idol. That's why he didn't do it.

The second opinion, which majority of biblical commentaries actually agree with, is that it has nothing to do with Mordecai trying to be righteous or not trying to worship an idol, but it had

to do with Mordecai refusing to accept a promotion that Haman took. That was anticlimactic. Okay. Mordecai was a scribe at the king's gate, right? He had a pretty high position in and of itself.

Are we going to assert that he never bowed to the king? Are we going to assert that he never bowed to any of his superiors when he started out in the bottom and moved his way up in rank? I wouldn't. But yet, here comes Haman. No, I'm not bowing to you. Hmm. Haman is specifically who he's refusing to bow to. Why? He gives a reason why.

And this is a little rich. And we can learn a lesson from this. And this may irritate people, the direction that I'm going. I'm just reading scripture and I want to try to glean as much as possible. Because if God can work with imperfect people, then he can certainly work with me and you. But we have to understand and relate to other people in these stories that may not be perfect.

Then the king—do I have this one? Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, why do you transgress the king's command? And when they spoke to him day after day, so this wasn't a one-time occurrence. This is every day when Haman comes into the king's gate, everyone's like, yes, sir, yes, sir, yes, sir. Haman, meh, meh, meh, right? This is day after day.

Haman, Mordecai, what are you doing? And they spoke to him day after day, and he would not listen to them. And they told Haman in order to see whether Mordecai's words would stand, for he had told them that he was a Jew. So day after day, this wasn't a one-time occurrence. Bow, bow, bow, bow, bow, bow. Nope. Bow, bow, bow, bow, bow. Mordecai, what are you doing? Why are you doing this? I can't bow to him because I'm a Jew. I'm a Judean. I can't. I don't. No. We don't bow to Agagites.

A Pride Issue

Guys, I believe this was a pride issue, if we can be honest. And Mordecai, for the first time in the story, plays his faith card, his religion card down on the table. I'm a Judean. No, I can't do that. I'm worshiping the God of Israel. This is Malachi. My God said no. Bam, throws that God card down hard. I'm a Jew. I can't do this.

This is the man that was perfectly okay with his teenage daughter being swept off to go sleep with a pagan king. Not so much as a peep. No, I'm Jewish. I can't. I can't bow to him. No resistance. It says he didn't even try to persuade her to leave the harem or try to enter where he had to. He went to the harem and just kind of see how she's doing. She's doing okay. That's

good. It doesn't even try to ester. Don't wear deodorant. Quit taking showers. Stop it. You stink. You won't like me. Come on. Maybe we can get you out of here. Nah. Nope. Agregate, I am a child of the Most High. I can't bow to you.

Playing Our Faith Cards

And do we ever do this? Do we ever get so zealous over certain issues in our own life and play our faith card? We play our religion card. Ah, no, I believe in God. I can't do that. We play it hard too when we play it. Anyone else? Just in certain areas of our life, we're like, bam, this is the area that I'm religious. And we play it so hard that no one can argue with us, right? I'm a Christian because of this. And then we remain silent in all the other areas where sin pops up and is overwhelming in our lives.

We may be outspoken on one single issue, finding power in our title as a believer. But then in every other area, in every other occasion, every other circumstance, we sit there in silence. Bye, dear. Bye, Esther. No big deal. No real issue with that. And it plagues us, guys. It plagues us.

And don't even try to be like, no, I've never done that. Come on. I know. And this is a real issue. It's a huge issue, and I have to audit myself all the time. Where are my priorities? Am I being zealous over in this one issue because of my own pride or because, as a believer, I should be? In other words, am I authentic or am I not? And that's a tough question. That's a tough question because we all have the same goal, at least I hope, is to be the image of the living God by reflecting who Yeshua is.

Authenticity and Accountability

And I know sometimes people say, yeah, it's an overnight change. Not all the time. We all struggle in certain areas. But this is a reminder for us to audit ourselves. Are we truly being authentic in our faith or are we just throwing around the cards? Because an authentic believer is going to be seen as someone who has equal weights and measures and whose scales is not off weight. And what happens here is we get this glimpse into Mordecai being super zealous about not bowing down to the Sagragite.

And I know what the next question is. Well, shouldn't he have stood and not bowed? And he was an Agagite as well, right? The story doesn't really tell us. It doesn't answer that question for us. The story only goes on to tell us what happens because he would not bow. Mordecai made a call. I am a Jew. I will not bow to this man. He's an Agagite. And in verse 5 in chapter 3, it says,

"So as they made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all of the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Hashuas."

The Choice to Resist

Mordecai refusing to obey, not Haman, but the king of Persia and the customs of Persia that he himself was engaged in, is what sparked, not to say it wouldn't have come about in another manner, but this is what Haman used to spark the genocide of all of the Jews in Persia. Now, Haman is an Agagite, and the author paints this picture for a reason. Agagites were an evil people. Everybody say the evil, evil people. Saul was unwise, and he let his flesh overtake him time and time and time again, but Agag was evil, pure-blooded evil.

And so Haman's response is that. "Okay, Mordecai, you don't want to salute me? I'm going to kill your entire people. You're a Jew, and the Amalekites hate Jews, and obviously Jews hate Amalekites. Let's do this. I'm not just going to kill you, though. I'm going to kill all of you." And so the question, if we can ask it, maybe this is too bold, should Mordecai have bowed? It's an open question in this story. Should Mordecai have bowed down or not? The author has no input. He's just telling us the details.

Two Valid Perspectives

And whenever the authors do this, just like in Jonah, it's for a reason so we can think about this. Option A: No, he shouldn't have bowed. I know it sparked all this stuff. It may have been driven by pride, but no, he shouldn't have bowed because you always stand against pride, evil, every situation. Haman is introduced as an Agagite, an evil character. Mordecai, as a Jew, as God's people, as a Judean, he's in a pagan land, but he's a descendant of a bad king, but he's still a Judean. He still has an identity as God's people. Haman, evil. And by refusing to salute and acknowledge Haman as ruler, Mordecai was bringing the fight to Agag, to Haman, just like Saul, his descendant, should have.

No, he shouldn't have bowed. That is a valid opinion to have about this story. And I love it. This is going to happen no matter what. Let's face it now. Preemptive strike now. No, I know what you're going to do. I know what's in your bloodline. I will not bow to evil.

And the other opinion is, well, yeah, I should have bowed because it launched the genocide of all of us people. And there's a lesson in that opinion because your pride will always destroy everyone around you. Okay, Matt, which one is it? Esther really isn't considered a wisdom text

like Proverbs is, but in this section I believe it is. The same attributes apply. Which answer is correct? Yes, that one. Exactly.

Wisdom Over Absolutes

When you've experienced that time in your life where you feel you're facing a Haman, you need to stop for a second. Do I stand up against this bully now? They have mocked my pride. Is this something I need to stand for and incite a conflict? Or is this something that will not affect anything if I can humble myself and just go on, if I can push my pride down and go on? And depending on that situation in your life, either one of these could fit, but you have to have wisdom.

Proverbs has many, many, many examples of this. Don't do this. In the next verse, do this. Which one is it? Well, it depends. It depends. Which one, Mordecai? If he had bowed, would the genocide have ever happened? I would assert yes, but I don't know. That's not the story. And so there are two sides. Which one's right? And the book doesn't give us an answer because it's not black and white.

And sometimes you salute because it's not time yet. It's not the place yet. It's not worth it. And sometimes you say, no, I'm going to stand right now for what I know is right. And so regardless, Haman is ticked. And Haman wants to destroy everyone around Mordecai. And Haman hates everybody who is a part of Mordecai. And Haman wants everyone around Mordecai to suffer.

The Mirror of Haman's Destructiveness

And Haman's downfall here is the reverse of Mordecai's. Haman's pride causes merciless destruction, whereas Mordecai's pride incites it, right? Have you ever not liked somebody? We're good Christian folk here. I know. I mean, before I was saved, there was that one God. I didn't really, but you know. Anybody ever not like someone? Like, really? You better get away from my cubicle. I'm going to throw the staple at you. So you ever not like someone? And then you begin to look down and have a hatred towards your friends that are also their friends. Right? Right? And you start to separate yourself, no, that's fine. You can have them. You want to be friends with them? That's fine.

You got friends that are maybe neutral in the conflict? No, you need to pick a side. You're not going to find them. That's Haman behavior, lack of self-control.

The Unseen Hand and Hidden Accusation

And in verse 7 here, it says, "In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the 12th year of King Ahasuerus, they cast purr. That is, they cast lots." That's where we get the name Purim, which we'll see next week, right? Which is a celebration for what God did despite imperfect people. And I will pay 10,000 talents of silver into the hands of those who have the charge of the king's business, that they may put it in the king's treasuries. So the king took the signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman the Agagite, the son of Hamathathah.

Gosh, the king is a pushover. Just a weak man. Yeah, sure, he's a king. Yeah, sounds like a great idea. Here's a signet ring. Remember the postal service was created by the Persian Empire. Remember that? Young, old, women, and children. Remember that for next week? Good. But the city of Susa was thrown into confusion.

Notice every single thing that Haman accuses against the Jews is nowhere indicated in the whole story. This is the first time we hear about the Jews having different sets of laws and doing things differently from the king. For the most part, they're living among everybody. Nobody knows who anybody is because everyone looks the same. Esther went and married this pagan king. She ate the food that was prepared by the king's unit, the Gentiles, something Daniel refused to do because it's not clean. When did Mordecai keep Shabbat? When did he pray three times a day toward Jerusalem for the rebuilding of the temple?

Raw Emotions and Hidden Hypocrisies

And there are so many raw emotions and characters in Esther. You have people who are supposed to be religious, and you have an enemy that exploits that weakness for his own advantage to seek and destroy them. So many lessons in this scripture, guys. So many things we can meditate on. This story is about the adversary. And how many of us are walking out lukewarm lives right now? How many of us pick and choose our passion points?

How many of us use our God card to fight the fights that we want to fight and not the ones that we should be? How many of us look at others to destroy and somehow count it our duty to destroy them along with everyone around them? How many of us find ourselves far from God, still attempting somehow to maintain our identity, but by our own efforts?

The Need for a Rescuer

Guys, we know we need God's strength somewhere in our life. We know that we need God's help. Despite being imperfect, we yearn to be used by a perfect God. And sometimes we want to hide behind a story that has a duality of righteousness and evil, and we want to blind ourselves

behind the righteous side. Oh, there's only two sides, and I'm the righteous side. Beccavester is not the book that you can do that with. You can't hide on good versus evil. You can't hide on good versus evil.

Because there's an overlap of perfection and imperfection in the book. And I love that. The book is written to say, enough with telling yourself that you're fine. Enough. You're not fine. You're not perfect. There's an area in your life right now that you're struggling with. Don't try to convince yourself, well, I'm mostly good. No. There are still areas that you need strength in. There are still areas that you need support in. There are still areas that you need prayer in. There are still areas for improvement.

And you need a rescuer and a redeemer that may not seem to be in your life right now, but he's here and he's now and he's ready. Esther and Mordecai were not perfect, but we will see that God is still with them, waiting for them to come to a place where they stand, when they realize that it's not about them. It's about what God destined to do, waiting to use them to carry out his plan.

Looking Inward Before Moving Forward

But first, we have to look inside and realize what areas are ruling over our lives. What areas are preventing us from experiencing the God of Esther? Do you notice the decree was to slaughter God's people? When did they do that? When did they make that decree? The 13th day of the first month, the eve of Passover. Author slips that in there. It doesn't say anything about it.

Missing Over It Every Time

We miss over it every time. We're like, oh, the 13th of the first month. This is Nisan Eve. Nisan? Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Eve of Passover. If it is in Egypt, it's Persia. If it's not Pharaoh, it's Haman. And all of this is leading up to a mighty redemption to take place. Someone to redeem. Someone to rescue.

A Reminder of Who You Are in Him

And guys, if you know the God of Israel today, if you know Yeshua today, you're not waiting on redemption. You're not waiting on a rescue. You're waiting on a reminder of who you are in Him. That's the truth of the matter. And I want to remind you today that despite who you are today, the blood still stands as a sign for you. Esther, Hadassah, is it Hadassah or Esther? It doesn't matter because you are his. And if you're willing to take that as your identity and

embrace that, there is always a reminder of mercy, of love, of strength, and a God that would stop at nothing to chase you through the most pagan lands, leaving the 99, right? Can we go there?

Salvation Requires Celebration

And so guys, as we continue through Esther, I encourage you guys to continue reading the story. And I hope that I've at least sparked an interest for you guys. We're going to close services here, just like the tradition that we're building, and I love it. In worship, we're going to sing a few songs together. We enter in with corporate worship together. And at the end of services, we're going to exit corporate worship together. And we'll have a few members of the prayer team up here just to the side. If you guys need prayer for anything, we offer it. This is something we offer every single week. Please take advantage of it. And so I hope that maybe this book, maybe you've seen some things in this book that you haven't seen before. And guys, it's going to lead up to Purim, which is a mighty celebration. Salvation requires celebration.

Hey everybody, I'm Matthew VanderRills, pastor at Founded in Truth Fellowship. And if you enjoyed this message and would like to see more messages like this one, please subscribe to our YouTube channel by clicking [here](#). If you'd like more information about what we do and who we are, or if you'd like to partner with us to make a donation, you can do so with this link right here. Hope you guys have a great week and we'll see you next time. Shalom.

Watch or listen: foundedintruth.com/bible-teachings/esther-learning-from-imperfect-people/

This automated transcript has been lightly edited for readability; scripture quotations appear as spoken. For the authoritative teaching, watch the video. • Founded in Truth Fellowship, Rock Hill SC • Saturdays 11:00 AM • Your giving keeps every teaching free: foundedintruth.com/give