

Lessons From Esther: Mordecai Never Grew Weary

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Just about everyone knows of the daring exploits of four young men who were captives of the Babylonians: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (also known by their Babylonian names: Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, respectively). Daniel's dreams and his faith in God, even in the face of death in the lion's den, and the others' courage and faith in the blazing inferno have become legendary. We look on them as towers of faith, strengthened by the great God to do whatever needed to be done and not afraid to follow through on it.

Their faith and courage are truly remarkable and to be imitated by us all, but we need to look at another among the children of Judah who worked in the king's palace to serve just as Daniel and his friends did. His name probably is not as readily recognized as these others', but his whole life's work may have factored more in preserving the nation of Judah than any other of God's servants during their captivity. His name is Mordecai, and we read the essential part of his life in the book of Esther.

This book is the story of how godly Queen Esther came to the throne in Persia and preserved her people from extinction through her wise trust in God. Without taking away from her courage, wisdom and devotion to God, the real hero of the book is a mid-level government official, Mordecai.

Day-by-Day Faith

The difference between Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and Mordecai is in the Bible's perspective. In the life of the three friends, we see a specific incident that points to a faith that had been firmly developed and displayed in one tremendous event. In Mordecai's life, we see him living day by day in faithful patience even when things do not seem to go fairly—a lifetime of living God's way and not growing weary in well doing!

Maybe the apostle Paul had Mordecai in mind when he wrote, "And let us not be weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Galatians 6:9). We may relate easier to Mordecai than to the others because in him we see ourselves striving to do what is right on a daily basis and in the seemingly little things.

Perhaps we see our lives and duties as burdens, and we are not patient enough to accompany God as He works out His purpose in us. We may see events and circumstances as unfair and begin to wallow in self-pity. If anyone could have seen his life this way, it would have been Mordecai, but if he did, God did not choose to record it as part of his character.

Esther begins with the king of Persia, Ahasuerus¹, demanding that his queen, Vashti, present herself before him at a banquet so he could show her off. She refuses. Whether she was justified in her refusal or not, as the commentators debate, she is nevertheless dethroned.

Ahasuerus sends out an edict for beautiful, young virgins to be presented to him so he could choose a new queen. This is where we first meet Mordecai, trained like Daniel and the others to work in the empire's bureaucracy. The Bible simply says that he, probably one of thousands of government servants in the capital city of Shushan, "sat within the king's gate" (Esther 2:19).

The Bible shows him fulfilling the role of a diligent father of his young cousin, Esther, who had lost both her parents (verse 7). Through the course of the book, we see that Mordecai had instilled great wisdom, tact, humility and grace in her character. He commands respect and obedience from her (verse 20)—even after she becomes queen!

When Esther leaves for the palace to be prepared and presented as a candidate to be Ahasuerus' queen, Mordecai warns her to use wisdom and not reveal that she was a Jew. This separates him from the daughter that he had lovingly raised, but he, as a dutiful, even doting father, checks on her welfare daily (verse 11). Even after she is chosen, Mordecai stays close to make sure she is all right, though he does reveal himself as her father.

During the course of his duties, he uncovers an assassination plot against the king and alerts Queen Esther to it. She, in turn, tells the king of the plot and the name of the man who uncovered it, but Mordecai is not rewarded for his diligence and loyalty (verses 21-23).

Five years pass, and not only has Mordecai not been rewarded for virtually saving the kingdom, but an archenemy, an Amalekite named Haman, has become the king's favorite and been elevated to prime minister. Haman has the king decree that all must bow to him, but Mordecai refuses because his loyalty is to God first. He will not bow before someone God had said He would war against from generation to generation (Exodus 17:13-16).

When Haman finds out about Mordecai's refusal to give him obeisance, he becomes incensed and plots vengeance against all the Jews living within Ahasuerus' domain. Exterminating the Jews becomes such an obsession that he offers the king the equivalent of \$10-15 million to let him destroy the Jews. He convinces the king that the Jews, who have amassed considerable wealth within the empire, refuse to obey the king's commands and follow only their own laws and traditions. Ahasuerus issues a decree calling for the Jews' total extermination and the confiscation of all their wealth!

Mordecai Mourns

When Mordecai learns of the decree (Esther 4), he leaves the king's court, putting on sackcloth and ashes as a sign of great mourning. He had been faithful in his service to the king, though probably only in a mundane day-to-day job. He had carefully raised Esther as his own, and now she sat as queen of Persia. He had saved the king's life and never been rewarded. And now, after faithfully following God's Word, he and all of his people are scheduled for extermination!

When Esther finds out about Mordecai's mourning, she sends emissaries to him to learn why he grieves. He tells her that now is the time to go before the king and plead for her people, but she fears being put to death. Persian law forbids anyone to approach the king without first being called (verse 11).

Mordecai's response to her is the key to his whole philosophy of life and not growing weary in well doing. He says:

Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

What a faithful man! He completely understood the providence of God and his potential role in it if he remains faithful. Despite all the reasons he may have had to feel he had been cheated though he had done what was required and more, his focus was still on God's purpose and plan. He would do his part and encourage Esther to be valiant and do hers.

Once properly encouraged, Esther sees her responsibility before God and moves to accomplish it with humility, courage, and wisdom. At this point, the situation having been completely entrusted to God, He too moves to resolve the situation swiftly and equitably.

Not only does Mordecai get the reward that he deserved years before, but he is clothed in the royal apparel of the king, the royal crown is placed on his head, he is put on the back of the king's horse and Haman has to lead it through the streets, proclaiming, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!" (Esther 6:11).

Haman ends up hanged on the gallows that he had built for Mordecai, and all his lands, titles and wealth are given to the righteous Mordecai. All the Jewish people in the empire not only survive but receive the upper hand!

An Above-Average Life

The book of Esther ends with these two verses:

Now all the acts of [Ahasuerus'] power and his might, and the account of the greatness of Mordecai, to which the king advanced him, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia? For Mordecai the Jew was second to King Ahasuerus, and was great among the Jews and well received by the multitude of his brethren, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his kindred. (Esther 10: 2-3)

Halley's Bible Handbook says in its overview of the book of Esther:

It is impossible to guess what might have happened to the Hebrew nation had there been no Esther. Except for her, Jerusalem might never have been rebuilt, and there might have been a different story to tell all future ages.

. . . If the Hebrew Nation had been entirely wiped out of existence 500 years before it brought Christ into the world, that might have made some difference in the destiny of mankind; no Hebrew nation, no Messiah: no Messiah, a lost world. This beautiful Jewish girl of the long ago, though she herself may not have known it, yet played her part in paving the way for the coming of the world's Saviour.

Mordecai knew this (Esther 4:14). He was an average man who led an above-average life because God was in all his thoughts.

Mordecai was a human being just like us. He had someone entrusted to his care just as our children are given to us. He had a normal, mundane job that he apparently held diligently. When a critical situation arose, he took action, doing more than he had to. He never complained about not being

immediately compensated. Even after doing everything to the best of his ability and trusting God, he sustained tremendous persecution, but his mind and heart never wavered. He patiently waited on God and his purpose.

Because of his act of loyalty, Mordecai's name was written in the book of records of the chronicles of the king (Esther 6:1-2), and his faithfulness to King Ahasuerus did not go unrewarded. Just like Mordecai, we have been promised great reward if our name is found written in God's book of remembrance:

So a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name. "They shall be mine," says the Lord of hosts, "on the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them, as a man spares his own son who serves him." Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him. (Malachi 3:16-18)

Our names will be written there if we follow Mordecai's example of faithful and patient endurance in living God's way!

¹ *Ahasuerus* (Heb. "venerable one") is used as a title for Persian kings. This particular Ahasuerus was probably Xerxes, a powerful emperor who maintained an empire from India to Ethiopia. The feast of Esther 1 corresponds to a six-month feast mentioned by the Greek historian Herodotus, where Xerxes and his nobles finalized three years of planning for war. They had been preparing an army of 2.6 million men and a navy that allowed him to cross the Hellespont by a bridge of boats a mile in length.