

Dr. Elaine Phillips, Esther, Lecture 3

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In chapter three, we meet Haman, the enemy of the Jews. The narrative is stunningly understated as chapter three commences. In fact, as we will learn from verse seven, five years had elapsed between the foiled coup at the end of chapter two and Haman's rise to power, and there are hints at significant changes in the interval.

The plethora of named advisors who surrounded the king in chapter one disappeared, and Haman was singularly empowered in their place, perhaps the result of security measures imposed by the threatened king. The king, according to verse one, made Haman great, lifted him up, and seated him over others, creating a hierarchy. The use of three verbs instead of the usual two indicates the significance of this elevation.

In addition, it was Haman who was honored instead of the expected promotion of Mordecai. Verse two reads as follows, all the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid homage or honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him, but Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor. Kneeling down and paying honor is another in the pattern of doublets, and the interpretation is critical for this narrative.

The terms specifically mean to bend the knee and to fall on one's face. The participles may suggest a continual bowing and scraping. Because the king had commanded this exercise, it had his approval, and did not mean something untoward from the political standpoint.

Mordecai, however, would not kneel down, he would not prostrate himself, and the implication of verse four is that it had everything to do with his being Jewish. Both were actions of humility and recognition of a superior. While there are many instances in the biblical text where Israelites bowed to kings, and as a matter of fact to other superiors, the expressions in those contexts are not the same.

Here, the Hebrew words are *kor'im u'mishtahavim*. The same pair of Hebrew words does not occur in any of the passages describing honor to another human. Instead, when these two verbs are used together, the individual is performing them in the presence of God.

This event was taking place in the gate complex, which was sufficiently expansive that Haman did not notice the non-compliance of Mordecai until he was informed. Moving on to verse three, it indicates that there was clearly an enforced uniformity, and Mordecai's behavior was both civil disobedience of the king's law, as well as a

public affront to the honor of Haman. The servants questioned Haman to Mordecai was a challenge.

In verse four, we find the servants keeping after Mordecai day after day, but he literally did not listen to them, an expression that often refers to obedience. Nevertheless, he did give the servants an explanation, which harks back to the meaning of *kor'im u'mishtahavim*. His not bowing had everything to do with his Jewish identity.

In reporting this to Haman, the servants wanted to determine if the words or actions, the word *divrei* can mean both, would stand. If this word intimates words, his claim of Jewishness might imply that he was depending on an ethnic and religious exemption. If on the other hand, the general idea was attitude, as well as the accompanying action, the servants were keen to see if perceived defiance would be tolerated.

Their decision to tell Haman represents malevolent intent. Up to this point, Haman had not noticed, and may have gone on being oblivious. But once the servants knew that Mordecai was Jewish, they not only ceased to try and persuade him to bow, as they had been doing, but they turned the matter over to Haman.

Let's read verses five and six. When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. Yet, having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai.

Instead, Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes. Haman's rage may have stemmed from several points. For one thing, this public affront to his honor had been taking place for some time.

Literally, he was not kneeling down or bowing down, assumes that, and furthermore, he had failed to notice it. This was a true humiliation. If the ethnic feud contributed equally to his antipathy, as well as Mordecai's, that may also explain why he was filled with rage.

Having been humiliated, Haman formulated a massive retaliation, by which he intended the ultimate dishonoring of Mordecai and his people's utter annihilation. The expression people of Mordecai is repeated twice. First, Haman was informed of their relationship to Mordecai.

Then, they became the object of his vicious intent. Something, perhaps the long-standing ethnic enmity between the Senates of Saul and those of Agag, or perhaps more widely brewing anti-Semitism, so inflamed Haman that this became a plan for what was really ethnic cleansing. The Hebrew text of verse 7 begins with a quote, in

the first month, the month of Nisan, a pointed reminder of Passover and of that great deliverance.

It was in the twelfth year of the king's reign, we learn here, five years since the events of chapter 2, both the accession of Esther to the throne and Mordecai's unacknowledged exposure of the assassination attempt. That poor, noticeably without the definite article, was identified as the lot, ha-goral, indicates that initial audiences would have been unfamiliar with the foreign term poor but knew well the practice of casting lots. In fact, the biblical text attests to the use of lots in a wide range of activities.

Verse 8. Then Haman said to King Xerxes, there is a certain people dispersed and scattered among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king's laws. It is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them.

We see here that Haman had unrestricted access to the king, a privilege not extended to the rest of the people, including the queen. Haman kept this charge that we've read vague, which was indispensable to gaining the permission he sought. His description was insidious, and the opening line carried a double edge.

A certain people, the Hebrew is ah-me-chad, made them sound sinister in that they were unnamed, and yet only one, and therefore insignificant and probably dispensable. Repressing the name of the people precluded identifying individuals, such as Mordecai, who was known as the Jew. Haman's presentation started with the truth.

They were indeed a dispersed people and, in some ways separated. The accusation then, however, moved to a half-truth, that they had different customs, and finally to an outright lie, that they did not keep the laws of the king. Haman carefully did not tell the king which laws were not kept.

If pressed, the only one he might have cited would be the command to bow to him. Haman's final ploy was to put the matter in pragmatic terms. It is not worthwhile for the king to let them rest.

Carrying on with this, with his plea before the king, verse nine reads, if it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will put 10,000 talents of silver into the royal treasury for the men who carry out this business. Prefaced by the obligatory, if it is pleasing to the king, Haman proposed a decree as a solution. The passive, let it be written for their destruction, removed responsibility from any one person, the king or Haman, and placed it, again, with the unnamed bureaucracy.

Haman's offer of 10,000 talents is estimated to have been approximately 60 percent of the annual revenue of the Persian Empire. We learn from Herodotus that its total revenue under Darius had been 14,560 talents. Clearly, as the second person in a kingdom where despots likely amassed huge amounts of wealth, Haman had considerable resources.

This, however, seems to be even beyond those bounds. One possible explanation is that he intended at least part of this payoff to come from looting the property of the Jews, even though he made it sound as if the sum would come from his own coffers. Prompted by the promise of further reward, he probably figured the loot would pour in and Haman could then use it to pay those who brought additional plunder, a scam from antiquity with lethal consequences.

This was a clear appeal to the greed of the king, and if Xerxes' resources had been seriously depleted by the war effort, it would have been indeed quite tempting. There's a further possible devilish facet to Haman's presentation to the king, and here we must presume, and it's a presumption, that the narrator of the Hebrew text was careful to preserve in translation a possible significant word play in an original dialogue. Haman may have intentionally played on the similar sounds of *avad*, spelled with an aleph, which means to annihilate, and *avad*, spelled with an ayin, which means to enslave.

If that indeed were the case, it would explain his appeal to the value of not allowing this unnamed people to rest, in the preceding verse. It might also provide an interpretive framework for understanding Esther's later reference to the effect that if they had only been sold into slavery, she would have kept silent, chapter 7. And finally, it might explain why the king seemed so obtuse about the decree to which Esther referred. He had been led to believe Haman's intent was enslavement when it really was wholesale murder.

It is significant that in speaking to the king at this point, this was the only term Haman used. When the decree was written with its triple terminology, there was no mistake as to what he meant. The cavalier manner in which the king accepted Haman's request to destroy an entire people, accompanied by a monumental bribe, is shocking.

If the king was under the illusion that this was a sale for enslavement and that it was for the good of his realm because his people posed some sort of threat, his response may be somewhat more understandable. Nevertheless, he dismissed them with the wave of a signet ring, addressing the money first and then the people. At the point that Xerxes handed over his signet ring, in which he was vested the authority, Haman's full name appears, followed by the epithet, adversary of the Jews.

The term is stronger than enemy, *sonne*. It is *tsorer*, one who causes distress. It seems that the king did accept Haman's offer in some form, as Mordecai would report a financial transaction, and Esther declared that her people had indeed been sold.

While there may have been some purposeful ambiguity regarding the money and the meaning of *avad*, once the king told Haman to keep the money and deal with the people as he wished, Haman's decree added the chilling and unmistakable kill and destroy. The king never asked for clarification, but gave Haman free reign to do as he wished, consigning an entire people to slaughter or slavery, and promptly forgetting about it. In verse 12, the previous mention in verse 7 of Nisan was a veiled allusion to Passover.

Now, the implications are brought in full force. Here the decree is noted as written on the 13th of the first month, the day before Passover. At the time when the children of Israel traditionally recited the narrative of deliverance from the bondage of Egypt, they would instead face horrifying prospect of annihilation under another foreign oppressor.

And after this, the bureaucratic machinery moved back into action. Scribes were summoned. Everything that Haman demanded was written in the name of the king and sealed with his signet ring, each action indicated by a passive verb.

Verse 13 reads dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the Jews, young and old, women, and little children, on a single day, the 13th day of the 12th month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods. A copy of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so that they would be ready for that day. In contrast to the sense of distance and non-involvement created by the repeated use of passive voice, here we see the decree-enjoining action.

They were to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day. With so much of the text in doublets, the force of these three verbs in quick succession, followed by the comprehensive victim list, is unmistakable. The closure granted free for all looting after all the rightful owners and potential heirs were disposed of in one day.

With verse 15, we see the couriers pressed to the far reaches of the empire where, as we learn from chapter 9, huge numbers of people rallied to the cause, even after the counter-decree. At the same time, the edict was issued in the citadel. The king and Haman had a private celebration, notable for its callous tone after the immensity of their crime.

And the population of Susa, significantly last in the list, was genuinely agitated about the decree, although we're not told why or what form this took. In fact, a significant part of the confusion may have been due to a vast and tangled complex of varying responses, from horror on the one hand to unrestrained glee. They were distinguished, these people of Susa, from the elite of the citadel, a minority that had mandated the bloodshed and where the edict was promulgated.

As we move to chapter 4, we see Mordecai's response. It was visibly and audibly evident. Torn garments and sackcloth made of coarse goat or camel hair were the clothing of exposure and self-humiliation.

Dust and ashes were reminders of death's destruction of the flesh. These practices symbolized ritual impurity and separation from God. Because of the inherent shame signified by the sackcloth, it was not allowed to sully the arena of power in the king's gate.

The extreme bitterness of Mordecai's outcry, literally he cried a great cry, was due not only to the threat posed to his people but also perhaps to the weight of his own responsibility in the circumstances that led to this point. His refusal to bow to Haman had been escalated to a crisis for the entirety of his people. His choice of location, however, is indicative of a further motive, possibly in his public outcry.

It was the best way to get Esther's attention and move her into action. In the seclusion of the palace, she was not even aware that anything had happened. Verse 3, in every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among all the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing.

Many lay on sackcloth and ashes. Here, we see Mordecai's grieving on the individual level mirrored and amplified as entire Jewish populations lamented openly. Fasting was a prominent feature of their mourning, and it's a counterpoint to the feasting that is prevalent throughout the text, and we'll see more of it.

As the rest of the chapter unfolds, Mordecai and Esther faced off, the confrontation mediated by Hathach, one of the eunuchs of Queen Esther. Initially, Esther challenged Mordecai. At this point, in her perceptions, Mordecai's actions were dangerously unsuitable, given her position.

The Hebrew uses the title, the queen, as the subject of the word was in great distress. This is a word used only once, and the root of it connotes writhing. Her reaction hints of embarrassment.

Dispatching clothing to him was an attempt to quell his outburst as effectively and quickly as possible, lest it have bad ramifications for her. His traditional reaction would appear extreme, and the ritual sackcloth would have been acutely distasteful

and unseemly. Esther, after all, had spent five years functioning according to court protocol, and was undoubtedly very concerned for what the king would think and how he would respond.

Cutting through what was probably a flurry of attendance, Esther summoned Hathach, the eunuch, appointed to serve her, and sent him to Mordecai. She must have had a high degree of trust in Hathach, and would have even more cause to do so as the sensitivity of this situation unfolded. The Hebrew, *maze ve'al maze*, seems to strengthen the interrogative that she asks him.

That may be the equivalent of, what on earth are you doing? With verse six begins the extraordinary exchange. Hathach's continued presence serves to slow the pace of the narrative and thus heighten the tension as he mediates. In this first venture, the discourse is indirect, as the circumstances of the edict were repeated for Esther's benefit.

In verse seven, Mordecai first explained what had happened to him, no doubt including the edict to bow before Haman, his refusal to do so, and the harsh consequences that resulted in his mourning on behalf of the Jewish people. Then he presented substantiating details which his sources had provided, even to the amount of money that Haman had offered for their extermination. He demonstrated that his concern was not based on vague information, but on precise knowledge.

To further confirm the gravity of the situation, Mordecai produced a copy of the written edict for Hathach. Mordecai expected Esther to absorb the report and act accordingly, which meant to plead for mercy and beseech the king on behalf of her people. In other words, at this point, Mordecai was calling upon Esther to reveal the identity he had commended her to hide until this point.

And this is the last time that Mordecai will command Esther. From verse 10 on, Hathach continued to mediate, but the words of Esther and Mordecai are presented as direct dialogue. Literally, Esther commanded him, that is, Hathach, as he returned to Mordecai, and her role as authoritative queen began to emerge at this point and would be fully operative in short order.

Verse 11, Esther's words to Mordecai, quote, all the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned, the king has but one law, that he be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold scepter to him and spare his life, but 30 days have passed since I was called to go to the king. Here, Esther's first articulated words constituted a valid apologetic for inaction in the face of almost certain death.

She expressed reluctance on the basis of what was common knowledge about a comprehensive restriction. The text says, any man or woman. Furthermore, everyone knew, and the implication is that Mordecai should have known it also, especially since he seems to have known everything else.

Esther's concern for her own well-being was founded on her not having been called to the king for 30 days, something Mordecai would not have known. Esther was very likely aware of other ruthless acts on the king's part. The added provocation of admitting she was Jewish would, in her estimation, make the case hopeless.

Mordecai's response to her was searing, pitting the privilege of her royal position against her Jewish identity and intimating that the danger was so great even being the favored queen would not save her. He said, do not think that because you are in the king's house, you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish.

And who knows, but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this. In other words, once Haman discovered she was both Jewish and related to Mordecai, her fate would be a terrible one. Mordecai did not say how he anticipated Haman might find out that detail or precisely from what quarter this treachery might come.

There might have been a double meaning intended in escape from all the Jews, as he articulated it. Either she would not escape because her identity would become known along with those of the other Jews, or perhaps she would not escape retribution at the hands of Jews themselves, who would be delivered from another quarter and then perhaps those who were turncoats. Esther may have been tempted to think that, having concealed her identity for six years, she could continue to do so.

Mordecai shattered that illusion. An initial reading of verse 14, which we've just read, seems to indicate Mordecai's unwavering hope in the providence of God. Even if Esther kept silent, he said, deliverance would arise from another place, but Esther herself had the opportunity to be a significant player in the deliverance of her people.

Nevertheless, it is not at all clear how to read the statement about deliverance by itself and then how to read it in the context of the rest of the verse, as well as the potential threat at the end of verse 13. For whatever reason, Mordecai had just warned Esther that she was not immune in the king's household, and he repeated the warning here, you and your father's house will perish. The latter included him, as he was her only family.

That would be particularly pointed for her, as she had been nurtured by him in the absence of her father's house. Further, his challenge to consider the reason she had

been brought to the royal position had its force only if there were no other alternative. Otherwise, she could easily be tempted to do nothing, resting on the hope that relief would indeed come from somewhere else.

One way of addressing the issue is to posit that help might arise, the Hebrew word is *ya'amod*, but it would be somewhere else, and the proximity of the royal palace to Haman in the center of the maelstrom would mean that Esther and Mordecai would get swept away. But here's another possibility. The second clause of this verse may be a rhetorical question that assumes a negative response.

In other words, the relevant portion would read, if you keep silent at this time, will help and deliverance come for the Jews from another place? Answer, no, it won't, and you and your father's house will perish as well. This rendition, possibly grammatically, addresses the problems that are incumbent on the traditional readings of the text. Namely, if help did arise from whatever place is meant by another place, why would not Esther's family, and especially Mordecai, also be delivered by this agent? As a result of the truly dire nature of Mordecai's challenge, Esther's mood changed dramatically, and the narrative takes a very decisive turn.

At this critical moment, Esther chose publicly to identify with her people, even at the probable cost of her life. She had been adept at managing the delicate balance of obedience to her guardian, and responsiveness to the demands of the pagan court. At this point, however, her strength of character was manifested in her resolve to defy the king's law, reveal her Jewish identity, and confront the most powerful person in the empire.

With the knowledge that fasting was an ancient and venerable part of her tradition, she called for a corporate and comprehensive fast, thus continuing the communal participation in this crisis that had begun as a response to the edict. A radical appeal for God's intervention, this fast exceeded all mandated fasts for severity. There was to be neither eating nor drinking for three days and nights.

Therefore, even though prayer is not explicitly mentioned, it was undoubtedly part of the enterprise. At the outset of her public identity with Judaism, Esther subjected herself to one of its most rigorous disciplines, and she further determined that her young women, who may not have even been Jewish, would fast in the same manner along with her. Following that, she would enter into the king's presence.

Her closing words to Mordecai are telling. In spite of this astonishing corporate appeal for divine mercy, she expected the enterprise to fail. Her statement might be translated when I perish, I perish, indicating her recognition that death was the likely outcome of either choice.

The irony is that her decision moved her from passive recipient to actor and initiator in the rest of the drama. Verse 17, so Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions. The first literally says Mordecai crossed over, and on that basis, early rabbinic interpreters suggested he transgressed the commandment of God by ordering a fast on the 13th and 14th of Nisan.

He may, however, simply have left the citadel, crossing over to the city of Susa to assemble the Jews and start the fast. At this critical juncture, the Septuagint, just for our interest, includes long and impassioned prayers of Mordecai and Esther. But then we return to the text.

After three days of fasting, Esther made her grand entrance in chapter five. To prepare for the encounter with the king, Esther clothed herself in royal attire and took her position. This was not just clothing, she was presenting herself on the king's footing.

But Esther stood while the king sat. The structure of the sentence focuses on the palace in such a way as to build suspense. Beit HaMelek, translated both palace and king's hall, Beit HaMalchut, sorry, Beit HaMalchut and HaBeit are used four times in one verse.

The two actors were positioned opposite the critical point of the doorway. The king was ensconced in the palace, she was approaching it. What the king saw was Esther, the queen.

Her regal demeanor again won his favor, that active idiom, and he demonstrated the evidence of that favor by extending the scepter. That there was a precise and unchangeable protocol as suggested by the measured and careful language in the Hebrew. Translated, the king extended to Esther the golden scepter which was in his hand and Esther approached and she touched the head of the scepter.

At this point, the Septuagint has Esther delicately leaning on her maids as she approached, her heart filled with fear, followed by a description of the fierce anger of the king, which is desired to inspire fear and awe, perhaps thinking that the Masoretic text, the Hebrew text, lacks sufficient spice. The translations and interpretations continue the melodramatic additions. Esther fell down, she turned pale and fainted, and although the king was wroth, God changed his heart and instead he left from the throne to her assistants and comfort her in his arms while she heaped upon him appropriate acknowledgments of his royal majesty.

Back to the Hebrew text, verse three, the king was obviously aware that something critical made Esther risk her life and transgress court protocol. His question commenced with the Hebrew mah-lak, literally, what is it to you or what with you?

This was not, however, the patterned rhetoric that he used on subsequent days. It was much more abbreviated.

Perhaps he was moved by her appearance and part of the inquiry was actually into her own distress. While it may sound brusque, he followed it with the further standard question, what is your request, which will reappear. The promise of up to half the kingdom seems to have been a convention, we see it again in Mark chapter six, but an interesting one nevertheless.

Even though he held the power of life and death in the form of his own scepter, he was ready to be dominated by her request and, in fact, promised to grant it before she spoke. Esther's request that Haman and the king attend a private banquet that she had already prepared is indicative that she had carefully devised her strategy. Given her venture into the king's presence, for her merely to invite him to a banquet signaled to him that the real issue was yet to be divulged.

Undoubtedly, this maneuver piqued his curiosity. The feast, in addition to fitting both court culture and textual themes, would provide a less rigid and public place for addressing the difficult and delicate nature of her request. The Hebrew form of Esther's invitation was in keeping with the stature of the two intended guests.

Literally, it would read, let the king come, verse eight as well. So, the king complied with Esther's request. Haman was brought hastily and the king entered, again the singular verb perhaps setting him apart, along with Haman.

At this point, the three ostensibly most powerful people in the Persian empire were together in one room. And so, we read verse six, as they were drinking wine the king again asked Esther, now what is your petition? It will be given to you. And what is your request? Even up to half the kingdom it will be granted.

It seems there was a separate course for the consumption of wine, literally a feast of the wine, a *mishte yayin*, towards the end of the banquet. Perhaps it served as the occasion for addressing issues that were deemed inappropriate during the main dinner. The king's first abbreviated query that we saw in verse three had been partly in response to Esther's uninvited entry in her evident distress.

In this context, his manner was much more measured, perhaps in keeping with protocol. If indeed the doublet petition and request was standard court rhetoric, Esther would have known that pattern and may have prepared her critical request, which she would offer at the second banquet, chapter seven, ahead of time to fit this thing perfectly. This double rhetoric shaped both the narrative framework and Esther's first pattern response here in verse seven.

A literal rendition is she answered and said, a very Hebraic construct, but it's double; she answered and said, my petition and my request. The incomplete sentence here is intentional, although this runs counter to most modern translations, which simply read verse eight as the continuation of this request. Clearly, however, her request was not simply that they come to the next banquet, as we read in verse eight.

A sensitive audience could imagine her pause, perhaps to steady herself if she was faltering under pressure. It may be that she spontaneously put off the moment when she had to expose the treachery of the king's favorite advisor and declare her own identity. On the other hand, the pause may represent the next step in her calculated scheme to undo Haman systematically.

Verse eight: if the king regards me with favor and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet; I'll prepare for them. Then, I will answer the king's question. Here, Esther was in full command of the rhetoric, the consummate diplomat using the full extent of the double forms as the king himself had articulated them.

She phrased the matter exquisitely, making the king obligated to grant her request when it would finally come. Quote, if it seems good to grant my request, then let him come. Furthermore, she prefaced it all by her own flourish, if I have found favor and if it seems good.

The first expression, again, finding favor, is the more common idiom and perhaps indicates a certain deference on her part. The invitation to the second banquet, if planned from the outset, would further lull Haman into a mindset that would be stunned when the announcement was made and perhaps prevent a clever political evasion on his part. Esther's promise was literally to do according to the word of the king.

An interesting declaration in light of the fact that he had said he would do anything up to half the kingdom for her. In contrast to her first invitation, here Esther said she would prepare the banquet for them, not for him, the king. This is an unexplained inclusion that may have peaked twinges of jealousy on the king's part.

Thus, as the rabbinic commentator suggests, keeping him awake the following night. At this point, the narrator masterfully leaves the audience in suspense as the relationship between Haman and Mordecai is resumed. We again see the volatility of Haman in the next two vignettes at the end of chapter five.

Verse nine is also built on dyads. Joy and high spirits, *tov lev*, literally the good heart, characterizing Haman contrasted with Mordecai's refusal to rise or tremble. Previously, the command that Haman defied, sorry, previously the command that Mordecai defied was to bow and prostrate himself before Haman.

Now, having completed the three days of fasting and likely aware that Esther had successfully entered the throne room, he was back to sitting at the gate, possibly intent on gathering every shred of information he could discover. Seeing Haman coming, he refused to stand up as the first step in the mandated procedure. The additional verb is telling.

Haman had intended by his decree to arouse terror, but Mordecai did not flinch. As a result, Haman's state of mind changed to fury. He pretended, in verses 10 and 11, to be indifferent, but his emotion poured out in his overwrought boasting to his friends in the final eruption of his injured pride.

Craving an audience, he summoned his friends and Zeresh, his wife, who had to listen to a recital of things they'd already knew and perhaps heard numerous times before. The order in the verse may hint at what was most important to him. He spoke first of his great wealth, and then of his many sons.

After that, he waxed eloquent about his own exalted status, especially above everyone else of any comparable stature. If the friends had heard all of his preceding boasts before, the fact that he alone was privileged to dine privately with Queen Esther and the king was new to them. Literally, he had been brought to the banquet, just as he would be into the second one, and if that were not enough, he said, the same was bound to happen tomorrow.

And at this point, Haman revealed the great flaw of his self-centered pride. Even though he was second to the king, he craved the obeisance of one person who refused it, and whose very people he despised, Mordecai the Jew. By this time, he was so overwrought that Mordecai's very existence made him lose control.

Quote, none of his accomplishments was satisfactory as long as Mordecai was alive. In response, it seems that Zeresh took the lead in advising Haman how to proceed. The verb in verse 14 is singular, even though the friends were also part of the consultation.

As with the other women in the narrative, she acted and spoke in ways that elicited responses, all quite amusing in light of the decree that men were to master their own houses. Her counsel was designed to shame Mordecai and the people he represented, and in so doing, address the humiliation and wounded pride that nagged at Haman every time he saw Mordecai. The request to have Mordecai impaled on a ludicrously high pole, an eighth, literally a tree, indicates Haman's frenzy to debase him completely.

This pole would be seen all over Susa. The height may also be intended to reflect the fact that everything official in this setting was done on a grand scale. For a parallel grand scale, we might refer to Daniel chapter 3 in the 90-foot statue.

The same mentality seems to have prevailed. Moving to chapter 6, the pervasive coincidences in chapter 6 are clear indications that something more was afoot. The king just happened to have insomnia.

The chronicles just happened to be open to the point of Mordecai's good deed. Mordecai just happened to have waited for five years saying nothing. Haman just happened to be outside at a propitious moment when the king determined that this matter needed to be set right.

And the king just happened not to name the person whom he desired to honor so that Haman presumed it could be none other than he. The reversals were the hand of providence. Insomnia turned the story on its head.

If that hadn't happened, Mordecai would have been dead before Esther's second banquet. We read in verse 1, chapter 6, that very night the sleep of the king fled or was disturbed. A remarkably apt picture of the frustration of sleeplessness.

Commentators, both ancient and modern, have speculated on why the king was afflicted in this manner. Caught in the tangled web of his thoughts might have been apprehension that he had promised Esther up to half the kingdom. Perhaps suspicion of Esther's motives for inviting Haman to both private banquets and her intimation that she was equally solicitous of Haman and the king.

Or perhaps the memory of an assassination attempt that had brewed just outside his door some years ago. In any case, the reading material was the Book of Remembrances, the Matters of the Days. It's an expansion of Sefer Divrei Hayamim, which is a term for chronicles.

It's another example of the excesses of language when the action returned to the sphere of the Persian court. The verb form, which is *vayhi*, *vayhiyu* plus the passive participle here, suggests a process of some duration. It may be that the court readers were droning on for a good part of the night.

The record of the assassination attempt against Xerxes with names and titles was found written, two passive verbs reflecting the impersonal court and serving as a subtle indicator of the providential unveiling of these matters at just the right time. The passive voice continues in verse three, literally, what was done? Nothing was done. The young attendants provided the answer as they had in chapter two.

The specific reference to honor and greatness in this context is an echo of Haman's promotion in Esther chapter three. The misdirected honor there was an injustice that needed to be addressed. Chapter six, verse four, the king said, who is in the court? Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the palace to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows he had erected for him.

His attendants answered, Haman is standing in the court, bring him in, the king ordered. Neither the king nor Haman had slept and both had Mordecai in mind, but with entirely different objectives. As he entered the outer court, Haman was very early, indicative of the unseemly haste with which he was intent on doing away with Mordecai.

He also came to tell the king not to ask, truly a brash attitude. Haman had stationed himself in the courtyard to be ready for the earliest moment of access. His entrance into the king's presence came on the heels of the all-night reading, suggesting that he was ushered into the bedroom of the king.

And at that point, we will temporarily leave our narrative.