

Learning to Trust God's Unseen Hand

A Study of Esther

Lesson #4: Sometimes we have an obligation to perform a moral good, even to those who are perceived as our enemy.

In the 1980 science-fiction movie “The Final Countdown,” the USS Nimitz is caught up in a strange storm that transports the entire ship and her crew back in time to December 6, 1941, the day before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The ship’s Captain faces a moral dilemma: does he launch a preemptive attack to thwart the Japanese, thereby changing the course of history, or does he stand by and let the historical course of events unfold. His dilemma was based on the fact that he *already knew* what was going to happen and that Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor would usher in the United States participation in World War II.

For us today, what obligations do we have to do a perceived moral good considering we do not know the consequences? What if we are faced with a dilemma of performing a moral good to those who are perceived to be our enemies? In our text tonight, we find Mordecai, the uncle of Queen Esther faced with a difficult circumstance to act on behalf of the welfare of King Xerxes.

- Verse 19

- We pick up the story sometime after Esther had already begun performing her duties as Queen, but the role and purpose of the virgins throughout the kingdom had not yet ceased. A simple explanation may enlighten us to the activities in verse 19.
- One commentator writes: After the elevation of Esther a still further collection of virgins was made, perhaps of such as came from distant provinces, and who arrived later. We must keep in mind that the selection of Esther did not prohibit Ahasuerus from loving other virgins also and crowning them queens, even though she had the preference before all the others. Solomon had seven hundred queens and three hundred concubines.¹

- Verse 20

- Esther still displays obedience that reflects her priorities. She had a vertical obligation through Mordecai to protect her true identity as Jew, but also a horizontal obligation through Xerxes to perform her assigned duties as Queen.
- She was blessed to be in a position where these two obligations did not currently intersect.

¹ John Peter Lange et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Esther* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 44.

- But why was her ethnicity a problem? From a historical perspective, the Lord knew that there would be those who would not respond favorably to his blessings upon his chosen people. (Genesis 12:3, Exodus 1:8-14, Matthew 2:1-23) Furthermore, the Jews were free to return to their homeland. A sitting King would have a legitimate cause to question why a remnant of a certain ethnic group remains where they do not belong. Would this be a cause for concern on behalf of Xerxes? Perhaps.
- Verse 21
 - The remaining verses in our text are quite unique because once again we are introduced to the person, and now the position of Mordecai. The man who was at one time just the uncle of Esther is now in a prominent position. But how did this happen?
 - Barry Davis writes, “The author of the Book of Esther treats this section (2:21–23) much like a classified document. He permits his readers to know only as much as their security clearance at this point will allow. He reserves comment on the operational aspects of these materials until chapter 6, by which time his readers have gained a higher security clearance level through the study of the intervening chapters. His failure to address [these] issues generates a sense of unresolved tension that he maintains until chapter 6. Only then does he, by means of hilarious irony, declassify the text and thereby allow us, his readers, insight into data that previously had been “for his eyes only.”²
 - At this point we are not exactly sure why the two eunuchs became angry.
- Verse 22
 - Verse 22 sheds a little more light on the subject; especially as to how Mordecai became acquainted with the planned assassination.
 - Jewish historian Josephus writes: “Sometime after this [two eunuchs], Bigthan and Teresh, plotted against the king; and Barnabazus, the servant of one of the eunuchs, being by birth a Jew, was acquainted with their conspiracy, and discovered it to the queen’s uncle; and Mordecai, by means of Esther, made the conspirators known to the king. This troubled the king; but he discovered the truth, and hanged the eunuchs upon a cross, while at that time he gave no reward to Mordecai, who had been the occasion of his preservation. He only bade the scribes to set down his name in the records, and bade him stay in the palace, as an intimate friend of the king.”³
- Verse 23

² Barry C. Davis, “Expositions of the Book of Esther,” in *Ruth & Esther: God behind the Seen*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2003), 182.

³ Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987).

- The word translated as “gallows” in verse 23 is unique and has a wide range of translations such as carpenters(4), framework(1), gallows(9), handle(1), logs(1), shaft(3), stalks(1), stick(8), sticks(3), timber(19), timbers(5), tree(74), trees(71), wild*(1), wood(111), wooden(6).⁴
- The best way to understand the translation is to understand this particular method of Persian execution. The men were killed by impalement, not crucifixion or hanging with rope. In impalement, one end of a beam is sharpened and inserted through an individual’s chest from bottom to top. The other end is then planted in the ground. The person was subsequently left to hang until death.⁵
- But finally, Mordecai was never recognized nor rewarded as having saved the King’s neck. It was recorded in the Persian history books, but Mordecai received nothing. It is doubtful that Mordecai even acted with a reward in mind. Sometimes obedience and a clear conscience is reward enough.

Why did Mordecai intervene on behalf of the King even though the King was not a particular friend to the Jews?

1. The Jews could been blamed for the assassination. Performing a moral good may prevent greater disasters from taking place (such as Nero blaming Christians for the great fire of Rome in 64 AD).
2. It was simply the right thing to do. Our New Testament teaches us to respect our authorities and to do good. (Romans 13:1-7)
3. Mordecai knew that Esther was Queen for a reason. Although they were not aware of the impending danger headed there way and he knew not as of yet her purpose for being chosen as Queen, he nonetheless protected the royal couple from danger.

We may never find ourselves hurtled back in time in order to rethink certain decisions. We most certainly know it is very easy to armchair quarterback and criticize others who have to make difficult decisions, but the scriptures teach us that we are sometimes obligated to act and the failure to do so may result in worse consequences. May God give us strength to act in ways that are obedient to the Lord and bring Him honor, even when we do not get the credit.

⁴ Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries : Updated Edition* (Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc., 1998).

⁵ John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2012), Es 2:23.