

DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Fifty-Second Week - Saturday

HAMAN THE AMALEKITE

"After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him. And all the king's servants who were within the king's gate bowed and paid homage to Haman, for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai would not bow or pay homage. Then the king's servants who were within the king's gate said to Mordecai, 'Why do you transgress the king's command?' Now it happened, when they spoke to him daily and he would not listen to them, that they told it to Haman, to see whether Mordecai's words would stand; for Mordecai had told them that he was a Jew" (Esther 3:2-4).

The great man of the day in the Persian court was the Amalekite Haman; and the reader will remember the hereditary grudge and hatred that existed between the Amalekites and the Jews. We point out this condition because it seems to us to supply the true explanation of the most important circumstances in the history. Many reasons have been offered for Mordecai's refusing to this mighty lord the obeisance which others rendered. But that Haman was an Amalekite seems a sufficient reason for us.

That a rigid and somewhat stiff-backed Jew should refuse the marks of reverent homage to one of that doomed and abominated race is in the highest degree natural and probable. And on the other hand, the same fact adequately accounts for the absolute insanity of Haman's determination to exterminate the whole Jewish nation for the affront of one individual. Had Mordecai been of any other nation than that of Israel, then Haman would doubtless have been content to wreak his vengeance solely upon the man whose quiet scorn provoked him so greatly. But to learn that this man belonged to the very nation which had vowed the extermination of Amalek opened a wider scope to his vengeance.

Haman could not but recall the ancient hatred between the Amalekites and the Jews, and each time he witnessed the insulting demeanor of Mordecai he recognized that this hatred was inextinguishable. But then he would also remember that this hated nation was completely under his hand, being dispersed as captives and tributary subjects through the realm in which he had all but absolute rule. It is under this view that the bold and murderous idea should occur to him of destroying the whole of Israel in one day. To attribute this determination merely to the personal slight from Mordecai seems little less than puerile.

Haman had only to obtain the king's consent; and the light and careless way in which the monarch placed at Haman's disposal the lives of tens of thousands of his industrious and useful subjects is perhaps the most shocking example of even oriental despotism on record. If he had not been blind and besotted, then the extravagant sum Haman offered to pay in compensation for the loss to the royal revenue by their destruction ought to have awakened his suspicion that Haman was not seeking the public good but the gratification of a private vengeance.

But the truth, no doubt, is that the king cared nothing about the loss of the Jews. Even when he at length is brought to see Haman's real motives, his wrath is not aroused by his having been so nearly led into the perpetration of so tremendous crime, but that Haman dared to destroy a race to which the queen belonged, who would then be doomed to death by his own decree!

The plot seemed perfect. Everything had been well considered and devised. Swift messengers had been sent to all the provinces directing the slaughter of all the Jews on a given day, and even the selection of a promising day by lot had not been overlooked. What was lacking? Nothing that human calculation could have provided. Yet when the Lord blew upon this grand scheme it became as the desert sand before the wind. Even in the choice of the day by lot we trace the moving of the Lord's hand, for it fixed the time to the most remote possible period. The execution was delayed for almost a complete year affording time not only for the subversion of the plot at court but for the arrival of the messengers who were sent out with the counteracting decree. It is plain that if the interval had been anything shorter, then these messengers could not have reached the more remote provinces of an empire that stretched from India to Ethiopia in time to neutralize the execution of the first decree.

Some reflection has been cast upon the Book of Esther on the ground that the name of God does not once occur in it. That is true. But God himself is there though his name be absent. We trace him at every step through this wonderful book and everywhere behold the leading of his providence. To our view the glory of God's goodness in caring for and shielding from harm his afflicted church shines through every page.