

Family Feud

The Shadow Sovereign- Part 4
Esther 2:21-3:15

Without a doubt, the most famous family feud in American history was the feud between the Hatfield's and the McCoy's.

The Hatfield's and McCoy's were two wealthy families who lived on either side of a river named Tug Fork, which geographically represented the border of Kentucky and West Virginia. The McCoy's lived on the Kentucky side and the Hatfield's lived on the West Virginia side.

In 1878, Mr. McCoy accused Mr. Hatfield's family of slipping across Tug Fork and stealing one of his hogs. Hog-stealing was a very serious offense back in those days, so Mr. McCoy took Mr. Hatfield to court. Unfortunately he didn't have any evidence to convict him.

After the trial was over, someone from the McCoy family became so moved with resentment that he shot and killed a juror who had sided with the Hatfield's.

Everything escalated after that.

In 1882, 4 years after the shooting, one of the McCoy's ran for public office. He was verbally attacked and discredited publicly by one of the Hatfield's and ended up losing. Another shooting transpired which left 3 McCoy's dead along with Mr. Hatfield's son.

The fighting didn't end there, however. Those who supported each family along the border of Kentucky and West Virginia joined the fray.

The feud reached its peak during what was called the 1888 New Year's Night Massacre when several of the Hatfield gang surrounded the McCoy's home and opened fire on the sleeping family. They then set the house on fire in an effort to drive Randolph McCoy out into the open. He managed to slip out unnoticed and escaped the fire, but his family wasn't so lucky. His two children were killed that night and his wife was left for dead.

The Hatfield's and McCoy's were often headline news throughout the country. At one point the governors of Kentucky and West Virginia called up their state militias to stop the fighting and try to restore order.

When it was all said and done, the 11-year feud which last from 1880 to 1891 would consume two families and take the lives of dozens of people.

And to think it all began with a stolen pig!

In Esther chapter 2 we are about to witness a family feud that could prove far more devastating than the Hatfield/McCoy feud. Instead of taking the lives of dozens of people, this could take the lives of thousands.

It's the feud between Mordecai's family and Haman's family.

Many Old Testament scholars believe it's no coincidence that both Haman's family tree and Mordecai's family tree are explicitly given in this book. I agree. Haman's ancestry reveals why his decision to massacre the Jewish people isn't just a political decision . . . it's personal one.

The bad blood dates all the way back to Exodus chapter 17, where the Amalekites became the very first nation in the world to attack God's newly formed covenant nation.¹ Though the Amalekites were defeated in that battle, they spent the next 900 years at war with the Jews.

In the book of 1 Samuel, King Saul is ordered to bring the judgment of God against the Amalekites and their King Agag. Instead of obeying God, however, Saul spared Agag and the best of the cattle. The prophet Samuel indicted Saul for his disobedience and then executed Agag himself (1 Samuel 15:33).

Even with Agag dead, however, Agag's descendants still continued to spread and his hatred for God and the Jews spread with them.

While feuds between the two nations often erupted in bloodshed, Esther provides the devastating climax of the drama. The threat against the Jews has never been so great.

Esther 3:10 says, ***“Then the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews.***

Did you notice how Scripture describes Haman? It says he is “the enemy of the Jews.” Why – Because Haman is a descendant of Agag! He has history with the Jewish people so he will attempt to kill all the Jews throughout the Persian Empire and succeed where his ancestors failed.

But don't miss the real issue here. What Ezra wants us to understand as he pens this God-inspired account is that this feud isn't really about lost battles. It's about how much the people of the World hate the people of God.

On the surface, you can travel back to a defeated nation, an executed king, a deposed family and wounded pride to discover Haman's reasons for hating the Jews.

But beneath the surface you'll discover that the reason for his volatility has nothing to do with family history. Haman's hatred is inspired by the Jews' real enemy – Satan himself – who has been trying for centuries to destroy God's covenant nation in order to insure that God won't fulfill His promises.

This is more than an ongoing feud between the Amalakites and the Israelites . . . this is an ongoing feud between the Kingdom of darkness and the Kingdom of light.

Haman, like Agag before him, is just a pawn in the hand of a desperate devil who will spend all of history trying to destroy God's beloved people. King Agag wasn't the first to attack the Jews and – as we know full well – his ancestor Haman won't be the last.

With that as a backdrop, let's pick up the drama in ***Esther 2:21***.

Mordecai's Desired Promotion

You'll notice right away that Mordecai has been promoted in the Palace – no doubt due to Esther's

influence. We're told in ***verse 21*** that ***“Mordecai was sitting at the King's gate.”***

Now this might sound like Mordecai is sitting at the end of the King's driveway, checking license plates as people drive up to the palace – which doesn't sound like much of a promotion. But when we understand what the King's gate referred to it will change our perspective.

The gate was actually a large building just inside the palace complex. It was the administration building where legal, civil and commercial business was transacted on the King's behalf.ⁱⁱ

When Archeologists excavated the Palace of Susa, they discovered that the King's gate was actually 12,000 square feet in size. They even found an inscription by Ahasuerus which revealed that the gate had been built earlier by his father, Darius.

So to be inside the King's Gate meant you were one of the movers and shakers of the kingdom. You were in the inner circle. You went to the office parties at the King's home and you got a gift from him at Christmas time – probably a towel or a china cup monogrammed with Ahasuerus' insignia.

Mordecai has officially arrived.

But while he's working diligently on the King's business, some of his staff members inform him of a plot to kill the King.

The Eunuch's Deadly Plot

The plot is discovered in ***Esther 2:2***:

While He was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's officials from those who guarded the door, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasaurus.

These men didn't want to shake hands with the King . . . They wanted to lay hands on him!

So who exactly were these guys? Well the verse tells us they were “guards of the threshold,” which means they stood just outside the doors of the oval office. They were the last line of defense for the King.ⁱⁱⁱ

We're not told why they wanted to kill him, but the fact that they were eunuchs might give it away.

Herodotus reports that as many as 500 young boys were gathered from subjugated nations each year and castrated to serve as eunuchs.^{iv} It was a

brutal act that revealed just how much conquered peoples were at the King's disposal.

Eunuchs were always entrusted with caring for the King's harem. Many of them would become well trusted and leading officials throughout these ancient empires.

One of the most famous eunuchs in scripture was the prophet Daniel who was taken by Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, when Jerusalem was destroyed. Instead of growing bitter and angry because of his forced slavery and castration, he became a faithful and hardworking ambassador for his true and living God. He would eventually lead political rulers to faith in that God because of his diligent service.

But Daniel was a rare case. Often in ancient history, Eunuch's were involved in palace uprisings. So it's not really surprising to learn in Esther chapter 2 that these eunuch's are planning to assassinate the King.

Their attempt fails, however. Josephus tells us that one of the eunuch's servants overheard the plot and told Mordecai.^v *Esther 2:22* picks up the story and tells us that "**Mordecai told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name.**"

Esther made sure she mentioned the name of his most loyal administrator.

Mordecai is a hero! He has saved the king's life! You'd think the King would give him a gold watch or a pay raise or a week-long vacation because of it. But what does the King do?

Nothing!

The King, for some odd reason, completely overlooks Mordecai. *Esther 2:23* says:

When the plot was investigated and found to be so, they were both hanged on a gallows; and the account was written in the Book of the Chronicles in the king's presence.

That's it. No pay-raise for Mordecai. No pat on the back for his loyalty. No "thanks for saving my skin."

This is very strange because, according to history, acts of loyalty were usually rewarded immediately and generously by Persian kings. So there isn't any logical or historical explanation for why Mordecai's reward was overlooked.^{vi}

But there is a theological explanation. God doesn't want the King to do anything until just the right time. That time will come in chapter 6 when Haman is about to succeed in his demon-

inspired plot to kill God's people. The Lord will bring Mordecai's heroic deed back to the King's mind right when the devil thinks he has won.

The King will order Haman to reward Mordecai, even though – unknown to anyone else – Haman has just finished building a gallows upon which to hang Mordecai.

God is moving the chess pieces on the chess board of human history exactly where He wants them as He eventually moves this entire contest to a checkmate against the kingdom of darkness.^{vii}

That's the good news . . . but that's four chapters away.

So let's get back to the bad news.

Mordecai's Disobedient Posture

Instead of honoring or even promoting Mordecai, notice what the king does in *Esther 3:1-2*:

After these events, King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and established his authority over all the princes who were with him. All the King's servants who were at the King's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman; for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage.

You need to know that this is more than just some kind of palace curtsy or typical protocol. In fact, whenever these two Hebrew verbs for "bowing" and "paying homage" are combined together in the Old Testament, they always refer to worshiping and reverencing God.^{viii}

You can almost feel the tension rising, can't you? Mordecai is risking everything he's gained so far by refusing to bow.

Why?

I've read several different views from Old Testament scholars on why Mordecai refuses to bow to Haman.

- He's arrogant and upset that he wasn't promoted instead of Haman;
- He's not interested in court politics;
- He doesn't like Haman;
- He enjoys irritating Haman who wants everybody to treat him like a little god.

While there might be truth in all these opinions, the most important reason Mordecai refuses to bow is found in *verse 4*. We don't even have to guess at it. Scripture tells us clearly that when the King's servants asked Mordecai why he wouldn't bow, he told them it was because he was a Jew.

So Mordecai isn't reacting against basic Persian protocol. He's reacting against the fact that Haman wants people to basically worship the ground he walks on. A faithful Jew would never give that kind of reverence to anyone but God, and Mordecai will have none of it.

Hold on a minute.

Isn't this the same Mordecai who refused to go back to Jerusalem? Isn't this the same Jew who sent his adopted daughter into a Pagan harem and told her to keep her nationality a secret?

Yes.

Then what's gotten into him? For five years he's been keeping his heritage a secret and has made Esther swear to keep it secret as well. "We can't let anybody know we're Jews . . . that'll hurt your chances for the crown and my chances at a career climb."

Now, all of a sudden, he lets the cat out of the bag. Why now? Mordecai has finally arrived. He's finally made a name for himself. So why would he sacrifice his standing and reputation in this moment? Not to mention Esther's standing and reputation. People know Mordecai raised her. He was part of the celebration and his career benefited because of it. So what will happen to her?

Fortunately God blinds Haman's eyes to Mordecai and Esther's kinship. Had he realized it then, he would have tried to assassinate the Queen before passing his edict. But he missed it. He didn't connect the dots until it was too late – and his oversight would cost him his life.

There can only be a couple of reasons why Mordecai waited til this moment to reveal his identity. The first reason is that he discovered how insignificant all the other stuff really was. He was the proverbial man who climbed the ladder of success all the way to the top only to discover that it was leaning against the wrong wall.

His plate was full . . . but his stomach was empty.

I once spoke to my friend Chad, the Director of Sports Ministry at Colonial Baptist Church, and he reminded me how God had brought Him to faith in Christ.

He told me, "Stephen, I had a great career . . . I had plenty of money . . . but I was empty. So I began searching for Truth."

He then explained to me how he had decided to try to find a church that taught directly from the Bible. Though he was raised Roman Catholic, he visited both Catholic and Protestant churches . . . dozens of them. He told me that he drove by Colonial many times before finally decided to come in.

When he did, he saw the congregation and their pastor with their Bibles open and he was struck with the thought: "they're studying the Bible!" He laughed and told me that a sweet lady behind him noticed he was visiting and struck up a conversation with him. She asked him a few questions and invited him back. He found out a few months later that that sweet lady was my wife!

I still remember him coming up to me after a service a few weeks after his first visit and asking me to pray with him. We knelt down together and he gave his life to Jesus Christ.

He was no longer empty.

Mordecai has been in the Palace for at least 4 years now. He has a private office down the hall from the oval office. He has servants and prestige and power, and his adopted daughter is the Queen of Persia.

He has everything . . . but it feels like nothing.

Is that your story today, friend? Maybe you find yourself saying, "There's gotta be something else . . . something more . . . something different!"

Mordecai knew what he needed. He was running from the true and living God – the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

He's seen enough to know that there must be a greater kingdom than the kingdom of Persia. Persia was a mess, led by an emotionally adolescent King who accomplished nothing more than to add to his harem and palace.

One author put it well when he wrote, "Disappointment is the nurse of wisdom."^{ix}

Maybe you too have seen just enough of the world to know there's gotta be more to life than this.

Mordecai knows what it is, and for the first time in this book he's not ashamed to reveal it.

So that might be the first reason Mordecai decides to tell his secret.

The second and more explicit reason Mordecai reveals his heritage is because he knows that to reverence anyone but God is to break God's law. In other words, he decides to finally take a stand for the word of God.

No wonder J. Vernon McGee wrote, "At this point in the story I'm ready to throw my hat in the air and say, "Hurray for Mordecai! For the first time, he is taking a stand for God – and it will cost him potentially everything."^x

Every time Haman strutted through the gate and into the presidential office, everyone bowed. Up to this point, Mordecai must have found impressive ways to keep from bowing. Maybe he would slip into the bathroom whenever Haman came in or bend over the water fountain to get a drink.

But not this time. Mordecai isn't going to hide anymore. As Haman's familiar chariot pulls up to the gate and everyone bows before him, Mordecai's jaw is set. Literally and figuratively speaking, he is the only man left standing.

Haman's Death Edict

Haman responds in *verse 5-6*:

When Haman saw that Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage to him, Haman was filled with rage. (6) But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone for they had told him who the people of Mordecai were; therefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.

As far as Haman is concerned, Mordecai's disrespect is perfect for him. He will use it as an excuse to settle this family feud once and for all.

He doesn't want the life of one Jew. He wants to eradicate every single Jew living throughout the kingdom – which, by the way, included Jerusalem.^{xi}

So Haman seeks the counsel of his gods to find out what to do next. *Esther 3:7*:

In the first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, Pur, that is the lot, was cast before Haman from day to day and from month to month, until the twelfth month, that is the month Adar.

This lot was cast to discover the best date for exterminating the Jewish people. *Verse 13* tells us

what date the lot drew up: ***"The thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar.***

Haman is the only one asking his god for advice on what to do next. According to Persian custom, he gets the voodoo doctors to come over and cast the *Pur* to determine the will of the gods.

The word *Pur* is the Akkadian word for "stone." These stones were usually made from baked clay and shaped like modern dice. They were marked on all six sides and cast out from a bowl.^{xii}

So Haman rolls the dice and they happen to land on the 13th day of Adar. It just so happens that this day is an incredibly significant day for the Jews. It marks the day before they will celebrate Passover as a nation to remember how God delivered them from slavery in Egypt 900 years earlier.

The Jews are about to get an unforgettable reminder that God isn't just a Savior in the past . . . He's a Savior in the present.

Haman's throwing dice in his living room and he thinks he's found his lucky numbers. He failed to read Solomon's words in *Proverbs 16:33* that ***"The lot is cast into the lap, but every decision is from the Lord."***

God determined the roll of that dice. He's going to bring about a miracle on this particular day because He wants to draw the hearts of His people back to Him.

Can you see God's hand behind this scene? It's unmistakable, isn't it?! The Jews have no idea about the terrible tragedy that is about to befall them, but God knows.

And He has a plan that will save them.

Notice how clever Haman is as he approaches the King in *Esther 3:8*:

Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, 'There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of all other people and they do not observe the king's laws, so it is not in the King's interest to let them remain.'

Haman obviously knows what buttons to push. Remember that the King is still harboring resentment for Vashti's rebellion, two humiliating military defeats, and an attempted assassination by two of his trusted officers.^{xiii}

Haman knows the King is in a vulnerable state. The slightest hint of rebellion will trigger him to act . . . immediately!

But that isn't all he proposes to the King. He sweetens the pot even more in the middle of *verse 9* when he promises to pay the King 10,000 talents of silver once the genocide is complete. That's nearly 400 tons of silver – worth millions of dollars in today economy!

But where in the world would Haman get that kind of money?

You guessed it . . . the Jews.

Similar to how the Third Reich became wealthy during World War 2 by stripping the Jews of their assets and possessions, Haman will make Persia wealthier by plundering the Jews.

The King's response in verse 10 is a little odd, because he says to Haman, "I don't want your silver or the people." Scholars, however, confirm this was just Middle Eastern posturing. In fact, we find out later in *chapter 4* that the King did expect to be paid in silver.

So the deal is struck and the edict is sent all throughout the kingdom. The Jews are going die on the eve of their Passover.

There are no loopholes in this edict either. The King makes his intentions clear in *verse 13*:

Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces to destroy, to kill and to annihilate all the Jews – both young and old, women and children, in one day – the 13th day of the 12th month, which is the month Adar, and to seize their possessions as plunder.

And the entire kingdom is told to get ready for this day of slaughter.

The Jews escaped Egypt, but they will not escape Persia. The King of darkness is wringing his hands in delight.

Haman's deception has worked. You can just picture him standing behind the King, whispering in his ear things like, "Listen Ahasuerus, the Jews don't belong here. They're not like us. They're a threat to you because they really follow a different leader. They're in our way. Let's just get rid of them."

The Jewish people in Persia will be marginalized and treated with suspicion. Friendships will end.

Jewish businesses will fold. God's people will be avoided, feared, hated, envied and then killed.

This is similar to what happened to them during World War II.

On the evening of November 9, 1938, just 73 years ago, a spontaneous eruption of violence occurred against the Jews throughout Germany and Austria. The riots became known as Crystal Night because of the shattering of the windows of Jewish shops, stores and homes.^{xiv}

The tension had been mounting. The Jewish people had been marginalized for months. Whispers had been circulating throughout Germany that the Jews were different . . . that they were a threat to Germany . . . that they were in the way of progress.

Himmler echoed the words of Hitler when he said of the Jews, "They do not belong to the same species but only imitate humans – they are as far removed from us as animals are from humans."^{xv}

And as Hitler's troops marched against the Jews, they would these unthinkable lyrics:

Sharpen the long knives on the pavement stone;
Sink the knives into Jewish flesh and bone,
Let the blood flow freely.^{xvi}

Where does that kind of hatred and violence originate? It doesn't originate in the heart of the King of Persia or his Prime Minister; it originates in the heart of the King of Darkness.

Satan is the ultimate Jew hater. His last gasp of defiance against God is found in *Revelation 20* where he will bring to Jerusalem a final holocaust. That's why the pages of history are stained with the blood of the Jew.

So while God works in mysterious ways, Satan doesn't. His message is always the same. His actions are predictable.

He hates the thought of a Jewish Messiah. He hates the thought of God keeping His covenant to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He hates the idea of redemption. So he battles on against God and His people.

The Haman's and Hitler's of history have come and gone. But the real genius behind their genocide lives on.

That's why it's important to understand how closely connected Hitler was to the occult and Satanism.

Hitler hated Jesus Christ and the church.

In Erwin Lutzer's courageous book, *Hitler's Cross*, he digs into historical records and reveals just how deeply Hitler was involved with the devil.

According to Lutzer's research, Hitler's dance with the devil started in the Hofsborg Library in Vienna. There was a spear on display in the library which was said to be the spear that pierced Christ's side at the cross. Hitler first saw the spear when he was taking a tour of the Library in his early twenties. On that tour, he overheard the tour guide say, "This spear is shrouded in mystery; whoever unlocks its secrets will rule the world."

Those words would change Hitler's life. He stood before the spear that very day and vowed to follow Satan. He would come into that library and stare at the spear for hours, inviting its hidden powers to invade his soul. He believed this ancient weapon was a bridge between the natural world and the spiritual world.

Walter Stein, a friend of Hitler in those days, said that Hitler would stand before that spear "like a man in a trance or a man over whom some dreadful spell had been cast." He went on to say that "the very space around him seemed enlivened with some kind of ghostly light. He appeared transformed as if some mighty Spirit now inhabited his very soul, creating within and around him an evil transformation."^{xvii}

What else could account for his mesmerizing sway over the masses? What else could make world leaders tremble at the sight of him? He was transformed with this one passion – a demonic passion. He was really just another Haman.

When Hitler eventually marched victoriously into Vienna, he went into that library, took out the spear for himself and claimed, "I am now holding the whole world in my hands."^{xviii}

He almost did too.

But he too would fail to become Satan's final antichrist. He would lose the war against the world and God's people. On his deathbed, he would hear the whisper of divine providence saying, "Checkmate."

God owns the chess pieces. He owns the chess board. He owns the table on which it sits in every nation. He owns the land on which the table stands. Mankind moves the pieces on their own will, but in the end they find out that their movements have ultimately accomplished God's will.

So what was God doing as He moved these pieces to fulfill His will? He was preparing His

people to remember that even in Persia, He was sovereign.

He's bringing the Jewish people back to the moral of the story. . . that they won't find security in the government or in their friends or in their banks accounts and they can't hide anywhere Persia. There is nothing they can do.

And that's exactly where God wants them.

Let me read you another story from Lutzer's book, *Hitler's Cross*, to illustrate this point. In June 1937, a Pastor by the name of Dr. Niemoller bravely preached these words to his congregation during the days of the Third Reich:

We have no more thought of using our own powers to escape the authorities than the Apostles of old. No more are we ready to keep silent at man's request when God commands us to speak. For it is, and must remain, the case that we must obey God rather than man.

Within a few days, Niemoller was arrested and imprisoned. He was held for 7 months in solitary confinement before facing his trial on February 7, 1938. The indictments against him were 14 pages long. He was accused of speaking against the Reich with malicious and provocative criticism. He had violated the law and was charged with "Abuse of Pulpit".

When February 7th rolled around, a uniformed soldier escorted him to the courtroom. As he made his way through the long tunnel he became filled with dread and loneliness. He knew what the outcome would be. But what he didn't know was why no one had showed up to join him. Where were his family and friends? Where was his church that had stood with him?

He hadn't heard from them.

But while he was becoming distraught with these thoughts, something remarkable suddenly happened. The soldier, whose face had so far been impassive and who had not uttered a word, began to speak.

His voice was so soft, however, that Niemoller couldn't understand the words at first. But as they reverberated over and over again along the walls of the tunnel, Niemoller finally made them out. They were the words of *Proverbs 18:10*: "***The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe.***"

At once his fear was gone. A new sense of hope and trust took its place. Niemoller would be condemned by the Third Reich and sent to a concentration camp for 7 years. But he survived and was liberated at the end of the war to tell his story.^{xix}

Like Niemoller, this generation of Israelites are about to walk through the darkest and most terrifying tunnel they have ever walked through. But they too will discover the truth of ***Proverbs 18:10***.

- When everyone else is unjust, He isn't.
- When everyone else gives up, He doesn't.
- When no one seems to notice, He does.

- When no one seems to care He always will.
- Even when God seems distant, He is present;
- Even when God seems removed . . . He remains Sovereign and faithful.

You know what God is doing in Esther chapter 3? He's moving the chess pieces of history so that His people will once again discover that He is their rock. He is their strong tower.

Perhaps that's exactly the lesson God wants you to relearn today.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/09/2011 by Stephen Davey.

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