

THE BACKFIRE OF TREACHERY

"So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified." Esther 7:10.

Strangely enough, the book of Esther, like the Song of Solomon, does not mention the name of God. Yet, the purpose of the book was to make known the fact that God was providentially caring for His people.

The book opens with Ahasuerus, the king of Persia, giving a great feast for all the nobles and princes of his kingdom in the royal palace at Shushan, the capital of the mighty Empire, which extended from India to Ethiopia. Those in attendance at the feast were entertained royally. The men were entertained in the beautiful palace gardens and the women were entertained by Queen Vashti in her own quarters.

On the seventh day of this carousal the king, undoubtedly heavily intoxicated, sent for Queen Vashti "to show the people and the princes her beauty; for she was fair to look on." Vashti refused to grant his request and be displayed before drunken men, and rightly so. She deserved great honor for her defiance of the king. Her refusal was resolute and the king became the laughingstock of his guests. Angered by Vashti's defiant refusal to accede to his request, and to save face, Ahasuerus deposed Vashti as queen.

Among those who were entered in the national beauty contest, and given the right to enter the king's harem to undergo a twelve-month-long beauty treatment, was an orphan whose name was Esther. When her parents died, this Jewish girl was adopted by her cousin Mordecai and was reared by him. Esther's beauty and graciousness won her a favored place in the king's court, but Mordecai had charged Esther not to let it be known that she was a Jewess. Captivated by the charm and beauty of Esther, Ahasuerus placed the royal crown upon her head and she became his queen in the seventh year of his reign.

All went well until King Ahasuerus promoted a haughty and ruthless fellow,, who was one of the most notorious enemies of the Jews in all history, from obscurity to the highest office, that of prime minister, and ordered all to bow before him. This sudden rise to political power made Haman extremely vain. He gloated over the favor of the king and the obeisance of the people. He expected everybody to bow down to him with the utmost reverence and homage. Promotion, position and honor did for Haman just what they so often do for people, namely, spoiled him completely and hopelessly.

As Haman was coming in one day everybody bowed before him and did him reverence except one man. Mordecai the Jew simply gazed upon the passing dignitary without taking off his hat or bowing before him and doing him honor. Good man that he was, Mordecai was not merely neglectful of the ordinary courtesies, or just acting as he did out of sheer obstinacy, but evidently from a real conscientious principle. He refused partly because he was not willing to give any man the honor and reverence which belonged to God alone, and partly on account of Haman's animosity to the Jews.

This one exception to the chorus of praise and reverence with which Haman was greeted filled him with resentment and fury. His vanity filled him with vicious madness toward this man who failed to bow to his vaunted greatness. Nursing his wounded pride, and filled with resentment and hatred, Haman immediately proceeded to seek revenge by destroying Mordecai. So in-

satiabable was his fury that, upon discovering that Mordecai was a Jew, Haman conceived the idea of destroying all the Jews in the realm. He decided that he would advise the king as to the danger created by these people, and urge him to annihilate them so that the empire might remain safe. This was not the first or the last time that the Jews have been the recipients of such terrible treatment. The concentration camps of Nazi Germany remind us of the intense hatred and brutality that has been directed toward the Jews in our generation. Through the centuries the Jews have endured a ceaseless struggle for survival. There is scarcely a day in which somebody is not seeking to persecute or destroy somebody else somewhere.

Haman went to the king and told him that "a certain people" in his kingdom, meaning the Jews, were disloyal subjects and did not have any respect for the laws, and should therefore be put to death. On the ground that it would promote the safety of the government to exterminate the Jews, of whom Mordecai was one, Ahasuerus yielded to the appeal of Haman and issued an order that at a certain time these people should be slaughtered and their possessions taken as spoils. What a rash and merciless edict! How depraved the man who proposed this scheme of iniquity, and the one who agreed to execute it!

When the king gave his consent to this satanic scheme, he removed his signet ring and gave it to Haman saying, "The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with as it seemeth good to thee." What more did Haman want? He did not waste any time in calling the king's scribe, to whom he dictated letters and sealed them with the king's signet ring and sent them immediately to all of the proper authorities in all the provinces. The letters gave orders "to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day," and to confiscate all of their possessions. Thus Haman's hatred was to fall as a blitzkrieg upon the Jews. They were to be annihilated on one designated day. That was a rather ambitious undertaking, and for no other reason than to gratify Haman's resentment toward and hatred of one Jew in particular, and all Jews in general. In this attempt the nefarious and cruel Haman was like various others in that he failed to reckon with God.

It appeared that everything was in readiness for the accomplishment of the task. Even though sinful men are permitted to proceed to the point at which they aim, an invisible and all-powerful God frequently, as the Bible says, "puts a hook in their nose and his bridle in their lips, and turns them back" (II Kings 19:28). Many times God refuses to permit men to carry out their plans against His people. He is always able to take care of His own.

News of the decree caused a great season of mourning and lamenting on the part of the Jews. Mordecai tore his clothes as a sign of anguish and put on sackcloth and sprinkled himself with ashes to indicate his deep grief and wept loudly in the street in front of the royal palace. News of Mordecai's action was taken to Esther and she sent a messenger to inquire as to the reason for his mourning. Mordecai arose from his mourning, moved into action, refused to accept the cruel decree fatalistically, explained to the messenger the reason for his action, and, in order that she might know about the gravity of the situation, sent a copy of the decree to Esther and warned her that she too would be among the fatalities unless she interceded with the king and obtained mercy for herself and her people by persuading him to cancel his order.

Mordecai climaxed his appeal to Esther by saying, "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" He spoke thus to impress upon her that she had a tremendous responsibility resting upon her, because, by virtue of her relationship with the king, she was in a position to help her people in a way that no one else could. He urged her not to neglect her duty nor to lose her opportunity in the momentous crisis.

Recalling the rule that nobody enter the presence of the king without being invited, lest he be put to death, Esther was hesitant about doing so. She did not want to be slain for violating this rule. Esther reminded Mordecai that she had not been called into the royal presence for a month. The arguments of Mordecai were so strong, the condition of her people were so pitiful, and the time of action was so brief that Esther was convinced that immediate steps must be taken, even if the result should be the loss of her own life.

Mordecai reasoned with Esther and urged her to take the chance and to seek the mercy of the king regardless of whether or not she was called into his presence. He warned her that, inasmuch as she was a Jewess, she could not expect to escape the slaughter because she was queen inside the royal palace. If she remained silent and did nothing for the protection of her people, she would suffer the same terrible fate as they would. God had brought Esther to her place of high honor in order that she might be instrumental in delivering her people at this particular time.

Knowing that she was facing the greatest opportunity of her life thus far, and realizing that if she did not act promptly it would soon be too late to be helpful, Esther sent a message to Mordecai requesting him to assemble all the Jews in Shushan and call upon them to fast for three days in preparation for her approach to the king to ask him to deliver her people.

At the end of the three-day fast, and doubtless after much prayer to Jehovah, Esther attired herself in her royal robe and, even at the possible cost of her own life, courageously went before the king to intercede for her people. She confidently believed that her God was both willing and able to grant her favor with the king. She was acting upon what she thought to be God's will. She was ready to do His will and to trust Him to act for her.

Esther went into the presence of the king not knowing whether he would offer her the golden scepter or the executioner's sword. Impressed by her remarkable beauty, the king happily held out the scepter to her and inquired, "What is thy request? it shall be given thee to half of the kingdom." Her simple request was that he and Haman come to a banquet which she had prepared for them. This pleased the king very much, and he sent word to Haman to make haste and do as Esther had requested. At that banquet she invited them to another on the following day.

Returning home from the banquet in a joyful mood, Haman boasted of the distinct honor which had come to him in being the only man who was invited to accompany the king to the banquet prepared by Esther, and the one which was to follow, but he remarked that all of this did not avail him anything as long as he could see Mordecai sitting at the king's gate. Like infamous Jezebel, or despicable Lady Macbeth, Haman's adoring wife admonished him to murder the man the very sight of whom infuriated him. In substance she said, "Who are you, Haman? Are you not the viceroy of the king? Are you not the second man in the great empire of Persia? And yet you permit a little Jew to stand in your way and to spoil your happiness! I will tell you what to do. Build a gallows fifty feet high, and tomorrow speak to the king and get this permission to hang Mordecai thereon, and then you can go in merrily with the king to the banquet."

This idea appealed to Haman. He said, "That is the very thing! It shall be done!" Summoning his servants, he ordered them to secure carpenters and begin the erection of the gallows that very night. Early that night the sound of the hammers rang out on the royal avenue as Haman's carpenters built the gallows on which Mordecai was to be hanged. But the Bible tells us that that night the king could not sleep. Consequently, he called in

his secretaries and had them read to him from the chronicles of his reign. As one of them was reading he came to a paragraph which related how two of the king's chamberlains had conspired to assassinate him, but the plot had been exposed by Mordecai, and the king's life was spared. He had that read the second time, and then inquired, "Was anything ever done to honor that man for saving my life?" They answered, "Nothing, your majesty."

At sunrise a messenger approached the king and announded that Haman was in the outer court, hoping to get the king's consent to hang Mordecai being the real purpose of his mission. Ahasuerus said, "Let him come in." When he entered the king said, "Haman, I learned last night that there is a man who once did me a great service. I would like to do something to recognize and honor him. You are a man with a fertile mind. What do you think should be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor?" Thinking that the king was referring to him, Haman said, "I will tell you what to do, your majesty. Bring forth the royal apparel and the royal crown and place them on him. Then have the king's charger brought out of the stable and saddled and bridled with the golden bit, and the royal ornamented covering be put on him. Then have the man whom you delight to honor mounted on the horse, and command one of the princes of the kingdom to take the horse by the bridle and lead him through the streets of the city, calling out as he goes, 'Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honor.'"

Looking at the cruel and crafty Haman for a moment, the king said, "Haman, thou hast well spoken. Thou art the prince to lead the horse, and Mordecai is the man who will ride the horse." Haman had intended to hang Mordecai, but God had decreed that he should perform quite another mission.

When the parade was over and Haman returned, crestfallen and humiliated, his wife and friends told him that his doom was certain. So, with a heavy heart he went to the second banquet, and ther he heard the queen remonstrate with the king against the cruel edict which had gone forth for the extermination of all her people, and earnestly request that both she and they might be rescued from the intended massacre. She then exposed Haman as the instigator of that plot. The incensed king at once gave command that Haman be hanged on the very gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai, and his estate confiscated. The attendants promptly led Haman out and hanged him on the very gallows he had erected for another.

One of the paradoxes of life is that the poisonous potion which one prepares for another, he himself is finally compelled to drink. The Psalmist bore testimony to this same truth when he said: "He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate" (7:15-16).

Haman is the perfect example of the resentful schemer who gets caught in his own trap. He didn't know it, but he was having his own gallows erected. In the end he became the supreme victim of his own resentment and ill will. He struck out at another, but the blow landed on his own head. Ill will always proves to be a boomerang. It invariably backfires. Ill will always injures the person who gives way to it, more than it hurts anyone else. As certainly as Haman was put to death on the gallows he had prepared for the man toward whom he cherished strong resentment, the person who tries to "get even" with somebody is on the high road to personal ruin, for "hatred destroys the hater as well as the hated." A man says, "That fellow double-crossed me once, and I'll make him regret it if it takes me the rest of my life." How little such a person must care about himself -- his physical, mental, and spiritual health! One of the paradoxes of life is that the would-be executioner always becomes the executed. Christ said, "With what

measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matthew 7:2).

The Holy Spirit had the experience of Haman recorded in the Bible in order to remind every reader thereof that all who scheme and plan to injure their fellowmen should expect a similar or greater injury to be inflicted upon them. Haman planned for the hanging of Mordecai, and he expected to witness the execution, but he himself has hanged on the gallows which he had erected for another.

Robespierre, the Frenchman who invented and sent so many to the guillotine, later had his own head chopped off by that horrid instrument. When Charles I, who had destroyed Stratford, was about to be beheaded, he said, "I basely ratified an unjust sentence, and the similar injustice I am now to undergo is a sensible retribution for the punishment I inflicted on an innocent man." Lord Jeffries, after incarcerating many innocent and good people in London Tower, was himself imprisoned in the same place, where the shadows of those whom he had mistreated seemed to haunt him so that he kept crying to his attendants: "Keep them off, gentlemen! for God's sake, keep them off!" His chickens had come home to roost.

A bishop once said to Louis XI of France, "Make an iron cage for all those who do not think as we do -- an iron cage in which the captive can neither lie down nor stand straight up." The awful instrument of punishment was fashioned as he suggested. After a while the bishop offended Louis XI, and for fourteen years he was in that same cage, and could neither lie down nor stand up. You can be sure that in ways you cannot see the evil that you do will come back upon you. The wrongs which you do will have a boomerang effect upon you. God's Word says, "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23), and "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7), and "So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai" (Esther 7:10).