

OVERTURNED 3: PRIDE COMES BEFORE THE FALL

SERIES RECAP & INTRO

- Welcome to week three of **OVERTURNED**, our series in the book of Esther! By studying the characters' examples, we are learning how to stand for justice in an unjust world.
- In the first two chapters, we have so far been introduced to 1.) Susa, our setting, a capital city in the Persian empire, and 2.) a few main characters: the King, his new queen Esther, and her cousin Mordecai. God, however, is an important character who seems to be missing – He is never mentioned throughout the whole book.
- We also know the stakes are high. The King and his officials are using their power in harmful ways, and, as a result, the people, including Esther, are suffering from injustice. Throughout the book up to this point, people like Vashti and Esther have had to make difficult choices to stand up for injustice.
- *Discussion Question: Has there been a moment this past week where you have personally, or observed someone else near or far, stand up for justice? How?*
- At the end of Esther Ch. 2, Mordecai saves the King's life from an assassination attempt. You would think that the King would reward or promote Mordecai, but that's not the case. Mordecai's courage is recorded in the King's history books, that's it. In Ch. 3, five years have passed and Mordecai has received no reward. A new character has, instead.

BIBLE PASSAGE: ESTHER 3

- Today, we will meet the book's primary antagonist: Haman. Fittingly, Haman's name sounds like the Hebrew word for wrath. He is a cautionary tale of what happens when pride, anger, and self-absorption turn someone against their neighbor and towards violence.
- Haman may seem like an unrelatable villain. However, his obsessive need for respect and approval, honor, and love points to a longing you might know for yourself. How this need spirals into hatred for others is a warning for all of us.
- In Haman, we see the roots of injustice that produce wicked fruit like ethnic hate, discrimination, and oppression. His story speaks directly to the world we are living in today where unrest, conflict, and injustice seem to surround us. In Mordecai, we see another way of living in a world with broken systems, corrupt rulers, and hurting people.

1. CONFLICT CAN BE INHERITED. (ESTHER 3:1-2)

- Chapter 3 starts with a five year time jump. Mordecai received no reward for saving the King's life. Although this oversight may seem unfair and unjust, there is no sign that it upset Mordecai. He has continued working without disruption, showing great humility.

- Instead of promoting Mordecai, the King promoted someone else – Haman. The first thing we learn about Haman is that he is the son of Hammedatha the Agagite. This tells us Haman came from a line of people called the Amalekites.
- Throughout the OT, the Amalekites and the Jews are enemies. The feud between Mordecai and Haman in Esther is another episode of this centuries-long conflict.
- **Discussion Question:** *Like us, Haman and Mordecai were born into a world full of fighting. What are some conflicts you feel like have been passed down to you and your generation?*
- **Application:** *We are born into a broken world. Centuries of conflict and fighting have come before us. We may not have a say in the state of the world we enter, but – as we will see – we do have a say in our response.*

II. CONFLICT DEVELOPS CHARACTER. (ESTHER 3:1-2)

- Unlike Mordecai, who practiced humility and patience, Haman was prideful and arrogant, and people noticed! He was so disliked, the King had to command everyone to bow to him, something people routinely did for other officials.
- We don't know for certain why Mordecai refused to bow to Haman. No OT law prohibits this sort of bowing, and the Bible doesn't spell out any clear reason.
- However, from clues in the text, there are a couple of possibilities. 1.) Mordecai refused to bow to an Amalekite or 2.) Mordecai refused to offer respect to a man as arrogant and hateful as Haman.
- Whatever the reason, after years of being overlooked by the King and years of conflict between the Amalekites and Jews, Mordecai chose to peacefully follow his conviction. So peaceful was Mordecai's protest that Haman didn't even notice until others told him.
- **Application:** *Only we can decide how the conflicts around us shape our actions and worldview. We must choose for ourselves between pride and humility, between hatred and compassion. Like Mordecai, we can choose to stand peacefully for our convictions.*

III. PRIDE SPREADS INJUSTICE LIKE FIRE. (ESTHER 3:5-9)

- Haman's pride – his need to come out on top and advance his own interests – fostered an evil and unjust attitude toward others. Haman wanted more and more and, as a result, his cruel and unjust actions multiplied.
- Haman wasn't satisfied to just punish Mordecai for the disrespect he felt. Instead, he turned his attention to hurting all of Mordecai's community, indiscriminately.
- During Passover, a celebration of God's promise to save the Jewish people, Haman rolled dice (Purim) to decide a day to kill them all.
- Haman went to the King with his plan. He played on the King's fears of lost control, disobedience, and the different lifestyle of the Jewish people. He argued that the King must act in his own interest above all else.

- Haman's need for honor and respect, worth and love, when paired with the King's absolute power, resulted in oppression and injustice for all the Jewish people.
- Because of the hate of one man (Haman) and the just disobedience of another (Mordecai), death lay ahead for all the Jews. This is similar to Vashti's story in Chapter 1 and other moments present-day and throughout history.
- Haman's response to conflict was to grow hateful, harden his heart, and obsess over beating his rivals. His pride and hate was never satisfied, like a beast that demands more and more to eat. Injustice and destruction spread like fire as a result.
- **Discussion Question:** *How can we retell Haman's story in a more familiar setting with lower stakes like your school, your friend group, or sports teams? Who do you relate to in the story and why?*
- **Application:** *We can choose differently than Haman. We can choose to reject the ways our own ego pushes us to compete and outperform others at all costs. We can have compassion towards all people, even those who oppose us or live differently than we do. As we will see later in Haman and Mordecai's story, pride goes before the fall. Ultimately, God uplifts the humble and uses acts of courage to put out the fires of injustice.*
- **THE CHAPTER CLOSES** with the King agreeing to Haman's hateful plan. Verse 15 says that while the city of Susa fell into confusion, the King and Haman enjoyed a drink. Another banquet, this time in celebration of the impending harm of hundreds of people.
- **OUR BIG IDEA: PRIDE POISONS THE HEART AND POURS OUT INJUSTICE.**
 - ◆ Haman pursued admiration and his own ends at all costs. Like we all do at times, he sought respect and value in all the wrong places and his actions snowballed.
 - ◆ Haman's pride is juxtaposed with Mordecai's humility. While Haman crashed out over not being given one man's respect, Mordecai was patient and hardworking despite not being rewarded for his loyalty.
 - ◆ Mordecai stood for justice and respectfully disobeyed corrupt authority by not bowing to Haman. While Haman may feel satisfied with Mordecai's demise ahead, like the saying goes, pride comes before the fall.
 - ◆ We can learn from Haman. Hatred is no solution for insecurity. We can rest assured in our identity in Christ and practice compassion and composed civil disobedience like Mordecai, refusing to bow down to injustice.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(If you didn't use the discussion questions during the lesson, you can also use those now!)

- What does this passage teach us about who God is? How so?
- What does this passage teach us about people? How so?
- What from the passage does it feel like God is highlighting to you? Why do you think so?