

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Character lessons from Esther: Mordecai - wisdom in action

Hello, good morning and welcome to the last in our series of studies of characters in the book of Esther.

We have already considered Queen Vashti, Queen Esther, the wicked Haman and now we conclude by considering Mordecai. Perhaps right from the outset we should refer to the title that he gets so much in the book, Mordecai the Jew (Esther 5:13, 6:10, 8:7, 9:29, 9:31, 10:3). In considering Mordecai I want to pick out various parts of the story where the wisdom of Mordecai is brought out and put to good use for the blessing of others.

It may be helpful right at the outset to point out that one dictionary meaning of wisdom is “the right use of knowledge”. We would therefore do well if we can see where Mordecai put his knowledge to the right use and learn from it. Although his experience of life was a long time ago and many things have changed since then, I believe that many of the same challenges face us today. The first mention of many things in Scripture is worth taking note of and the first mention we have of Mordecai is in Esther 2:5. As mentioned, he is introduced as “Mordecai the Jew”. Although we will go on to see that Mordecai did not always broadcast this fact, it is a great thing to see when what someone believes in their heart so characterises their life that they are known by that very thing. How am I known? “Brian the Christian?” What a challenge this should be to us!

Esther 2:5-6 tell us something of Mordecai’s history and background and it is important to understand this and what it meant to him as it will have a major impact on later parts of our story. He was a Benjamite and his family name was Kish. This name goes right back to Saul’s father. He was proud of his heritage and we will see later how this led to some fearless actions to protect this.

We, too, as Christians have a heritage that is worth protecting and defending. Not merely of a birth line, but a spiritual inheritance. If we have been brought up in a Christian home where Christ has been honoured and His things taught we should be thankful for this. If we have not, we should be equally thankful for those contacts that came into our lives and introduced us to the wonderful things of God through Christ. Either way we should never forget “our history” and use this to motivate and encourage us as we move along life’s pathway.

The Apostle Paul, also a Benjamite, had a real sense of this as he wrote many of his epistles. To the Philippians in Philippians 1:3 he writes, *“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.”* The concern Mordecai had for his people should mark us as believers today as it did Paul all these years ago. The bond we have as believers in Christ, however, goes even deeper than the national and historical bond that was so important to Mordecai. Paul explains this well in Galatians 3:26-28 when he writes, *“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*

So as we go through our story and see how Mordecai had care for, and desired to protect, his people we should be challenged as to what we are doing day by day for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Do we remember them in our prayers, do we comfort those who are sorrowing, do we encourage those who are downtrodden, do we give strength to those who are weak and do we speak up for those who have no voice of their own?

In Esther 2:7, we see the lovely care that Mordecai had for Esther, who was his uncle’s daughter, i.e. his cousin. Her mother and father were dead and it would seem obvious that she was younger than Mordecai and he had looked after her and brought her up as if she was his own daughter. We should always be mindful of the needs of the young and be willing to take responsibility when needed.

In Esther 2:8-9, we read what then became of Esther as she was taken into the king’s harem. In Esther 2:10 we see that Esther, there in that strange situation, was still mindful of Mordecai’s counsel to her in respect of her people. Whether Mordecai’s counsel was right or wrong in this situation is not really the point here but rather that this young woman had seen and heard enough from the man who had brought her up that she had respect for his wisdom and obeyed him. Do we carry enough respect that the young will listen and appreciate our counsel? The sad contrast of Lot would come to mind here. He was seen as one who mocked when he tried to tell his own family about the coming judgement about to fall on Sodom and Gomorrah (See Genesis 19:14).

Perhaps Esther 2:11 would show us why Esther had such respect for Mordecai. We read, *“And every day Mordecai paced in front of the court of the women’s quarters, to learn of Esther’s welfare and what was happening to her.”* What a wonderful thing it must have been for this young, orphaned woman to know that someone cared enough to continue day after day, after day.

By Esther 2:21 it would appear that Mordecai had been put in a place of prominence and was sitting within the king’s gate. While there, he heard something that concerned him. Two of the eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, were disgruntled and plotted against the king. Treason!! On being made aware of this treason it would appear that Mordecai had no hesitation in doing what he knew what was right, he told Queen Esther and the culprits were quickly dealt with by the king (Esther 2:22-23).

Do we prevaricate with the truth? We constantly see in the world around us things that are wrong and should be brought into the light and dealt with. Yet it comes out many years later that nothing was done because someone covered it up. The Lord Jesus said in John 3:19, *“Men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.”* We surely see this day in and day out and perhaps in the last few years it has become more shocking than ever before.

Not so with Mordecai; he knew what was wrong and he was going to do something about it. He used his position to do the right thing but even in doing this he didn’t just rush in to see the king. It seemed reasoned and measured as he told Queen Esther and she informed the king at the appropriate time. Whether in our families or wider Christian fellowships, we should never flinch from doing the right thing when problems arise but it should always be done in a way and at a time that will be most conducive to bring about restoration and recovery.

In Esther 2:23 we see another interesting thing that is worth remarking on and thinking about, *“and it was written in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.”* This documentation of the facts would later have a profound impact on the story. How often are the facts of a story often changed with the passage of time and may, many years later, cause problems.

Perhaps we can borrow the thoughts of Paul as he writes to the Romans in Romans 15:4. While he is specifically referring to the scriptures, I am sure the same principle holds true: *“For whatever things were written before were written for our learning.”* We all know that we should learn from our mistakes but we should also learn from our experience when things go well and how can we do this if there is no record? A diary can often be very helpful in this situation. I mentioned at the outset that the same situations in life in respect of families and wider relationships often repeat themselves and how good it is when someone can refer back and give guidance because they have earlier experienced something similar, whether it has gone well or badly.

Another aspect of Mordecai’s character in this part of the story that is very appealing and worth noticing is that he does not appear to shout about what he had done from the rooftops. He has perhaps saved the king’s life and it would appear that had the king not re-read the chronicles some years later nobody would have known about Mordecai’s heroic and brave intervention (see Esther 6:1-14). What wonderful humility! In fact, as we get into Esther 3, the wicked Haman seems to have captured the king’s attention and been promoted. Perhaps had I been Mordecai I might have felt like reminding the king what I had done and should it not be I who was being promoted!

Then in Esther 3:2 we get this huge challenge for Mordecai. The king had commanded that the king’s servants who were within the gate were to bow down and pay homage to Haman.

Mordecai used his knowledge of the history of his people and knew that he would never be able to carry out the king’s command and still remain faithful to his God and his people so he refused. He never made excuses and he never gave in to the pressure of their daily questioning. This reminds me of the injunction to the believers at Corinth as Paul nears the end of his first epistle. In 1 Corinthians 15:58 he writes, *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.”*

Mordecai the Jew was certainly steadfast and immovable; he had made up his mind for his course of action and nothing would move him from this. We should mention, however, that we should never been seen as intransigent but there are some circumstances when we should be like Mordecai was here. Wisdom should then be sought to know the difference.

What was this knowledge of the past that made Mordecai take such a bold stand? The tribal feud between the forefathers of Haman and the forefathers of Mordecai went back almost 1,000 years to when the children of Israel left Egypt. Mordecai, as we have already mentioned, was a descendant of King Saul but Haman, an Agagite, was a descendant of the Amalekite King Agag.

In Exodus 17:8-16 we read of the Amalekites attacking the children of Israel. The lineage of the Amalekites had begun with Amalek, the grandson of Esau. Esau should have been blessed of God but had sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of soup so the Amalekites had a bad start. In Exodus 17:16 God pronounced a curse on them which should have resulted in their total elimination as a people. Saul, many years later, received this same order but decided to disobey God and spared King Agag. We read the whole story in 1 Samuel 15 and see that Samuel the prophet had to take matters into his own hands and carry out God's instruction in an emphatic manner.

So although 550 years had passed since the death of King Agag, neither Mordecai nor Haman had forgotten the feud between their families. Mordecai therefore had no hesitation in making his stand for what he knew to be right but would also have been very much aware of the violent reaction it could have prompted with his enemy, Haman. Would we draw back from taking a stance if the consequences suddenly seemed too much? Ever since the days of the early Church right up to the present day, Christians have been persecuted for standing for Christ. Indeed, some have said there are more persecuted Christians in the world today than at any other time. So may we all have the same purpose of heart as Mordecai did to face our own "Hamans" in whatever forms they might take!

As we go on, then, into Esther 3:3-4 we see that Mordecai's enemies were not slow in seeking to do him harm. Then when Haman got to hear about it he was furious and his reaction in Esther 3:6 was extreme. He would not just go after Mordecai but he would take out his wrath on all the Jews of the region. The remainder of Esther 3 shows us the detail of how this spiteful man would go after innocent people simply because his pride had taken a knock. Contrast this with the humble spirit portrayed by Mordecai. The Apostle Peter writes in 1 Peter 2:23 of our Lord Jesus, *"who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return, when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously."* It appeals to me that we see a little picture of this in how Mordecai deals with his enemies.

As we go into Esther 4, Esther 4:1-4 tell us the terrible impact that Haman's plotting had on all the Jews of the region and in particular Mordecai. He would, no doubt, have felt responsible and was distraught and inconsolable at the evil scheme that had been put in place. Christians should be concerned with the troubles and difficulties that face other members of Christ's body, the Church. In Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, we see this principle laid out and culminating in the words of 1 Corinthians 12:26, *"And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it."* Do I feel the concerns and troubles of fellow believers and seek to help whenever I can or do I just adopt an "I'm all right, Jack," type attitude? Mordecai's attitude gives us a good example.

In Esther 4:7-9 we see Mordecai's concise and clear analysis of the situation and his recommendation of what should happen. He had proof and produced the copy of the decree for the destruction of the Jews. When difficult matters are to be dealt with, there needs to be proof. In Deuteronomy 17:6, we see a principle of something being established by two or three witnesses. The Lord himself then talks about this in Matthew 18:16 and it is mentioned again in 2 Corinthians 13:1. So when something is mentioned in the Old Testament Law, then by our Lord himself, and finally by the Apostle Paul as he writes to establish the early Church, we do well to take note and put it into practice when situations arise. How many serious problems in families, churches, businesses and society in general could have been avoided or better dealt with had Mordecai's way been followed!

As we have seen in previous weeks, Queen Esther was fearful and concerned by what Mordecai had asked her to do but Mordecai had great wisdom in how he addressed her concerns. He was very honest with her in making it clear that even she was in a perilous situation but he then encouraged her by bringing to her attention that perhaps the privileged position that she found herself in may have just been for this one moment. He said, *"Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for a such a time as this?"* (Esther 4:14). Mordecai may have been uncertain but Christians know that every situation we find ourselves in has been allowed of God for a particular reason. In Romans 8:28 we read, *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose"*.

We know that all things, whether good or bad, pleasing or painful, convenient or inconvenient, in our plans or not, sad or happy etc., etc. are in His purpose and yet do we always accept them as such? Do we all sometimes need to be reminded of the sentiment behind Mordecai's words, *"Such a time as this?"* (Esther 4:14). They worked for Esther and she made plans to carry out Mordecai's instruction.

In the meantime she had instructions for Mordecai and we read in Esther 4:17 that he obeyed in every way. Here was a man who was brave, resourceful and ingenious yet he knew when to accept authority. In Esther 5 we see the working out of the story to Haman's ultimate detriment but it is worth noticing in Esther 5:9 that when Haman meets Mordecai there is still no fear or diminishing of Mordecai's desire to stand firm in his conviction. Then in Esther 6 we see how Mordecai's faithfulness was eventually rewarded. The king couldn't sleep and, while reading the chronicles that we referred to earlier, he found out about Mordecai's input in revealing the plot against him (Esther 6:1). Then in what we would see as a remarkable coincidence, Haman arrives in the court seeking to further his vengeance on Mordecai. Is this another example of the "all things" that we thought about earlier? God is in control of "all things" and we should never just allow ourselves to be blown around aimlessly by what many would see as luck, coincidence or

whatever. Our God is the creator and upholder of the universe and He moves behind the scenes to bring “all things” in line with His purposes. So we see that Mordecai is exalted and glorified instead of the wicked Haman.

Haman is then compelled to announce in respect of Mordecai as he leads him through the streets on the horse and wearing the robe prepared for him, *“Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honour”* Esther 6:6). The world in which we live today has by and large rejected the Lord Jesus Christ. It happened all those years ago when the crowd cried out *“Away with Him”* (John 19:15), *“Let Him be crucified”* (Matthew 27:22-23). In the main, the message is still the same today but a day is coming when He will be rightly exalted. Philippians 2:10-11 tells us *“that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on the earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* It is our desire and prayer that all who are listening to this message will own Him as Lord now!

In Esther 8:15-18, we see Mordecai now exalted because of his faithfulness and the wonderful joy that this brought to his people. How lovely it is to see others blessed by someone’s exaltation. It was however not just within his own people that there was light and gladness, joy and honour. No, No! Many people became Jews because of the testimony that went forward from what had happened. As we rejoice in the blessings of God through Christ, as we delight in the light into which we have been brought, how good it is if others come to know Christ, too, because of what they see in us!

In Esther 9:20-23, we see another aspect to Mordecai that is worth noting. His care and consideration for his people does not just go to those of that time but he has an eye to the future. He wants to make sure that the things that happened are not forgotten and are remembered for generations to come so that the people are strengthened. How much this reminds us of what our Lord did on the night before He was crucified when He took His own to an upper room and instituted the Lord’s supper (Luke 22:14-23). He could say, *“This do in remembrance of Me”* (Luke 22:19, 1 Corinthians 11:25). This should encourage and strengthen us each time we partake of the bread and wine and so show forth His death to the world (1 Corinthians 11:26).

In Esther 9:28-29 we see a second letter written. It appeals to me that this man who had been through so much and was now exalted and vindicated didn’t simply take his ease but was still active and seeking the good of his people.

Finally in Esther 10:3 we see Mordecai now exalted to the position of second only to King Ahasuerus and yet he was still seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to them. We trust that that the Lord will be able to take these considerations about Mordecai and use them as a blessing and encouragement for us all.

Thank you for listening.

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