

Haman

My name is Haman. In Susa, capital of the Persian Empire under Xerxes, I would have needed no introduction. But I carried a generational burden. You don't really know what a feud is unless you are part of one. The Jews have opposed the Amalekites since before their warrior-priest, Samuel, killed the founder of my family, Agag. When I got a chance to wipe them out, it looked like my destiny had come true.

It took intelligence and ruthlessness to get to the place of influence that I did. King Xerxes is decisive and quick. When Queen Vashti refused to appear before his drunken friends at a state gathering, he deposed her.

His advisors steered him to the right conclusion. If this act of rebellion was allowed to stand, no man would be the lord of his own household, even over his wife and slaves.

I had the king's ear, praised his actions and went from trusted official to Prime Minister. I had become wealthy, which facilitated good standing with the king. And I strategically donated to the royal charity.

Things were going exactly as I had planned except for one chronic irritation, a relative of the new queen. That is another story for the record books! Xerxes did not follow the age-old protocol for choosing a queen – finding a princess of a neighboring country whose alliance would be beneficial to the kingdom. No, he called for an unprecedented international “beauty-contest.”

He entrusted the whole thing to his eunuchs who scoured the empire for eligible candidates. It could have been done as a front for a real choice between women of royal stock, but the king made a tactical error. Well, he was middle aged and naturally wanted a compliant “trophy wife” this time. By rescuing a “nobody,” he could expect complete obedience and none of the “principles” that spoiled Vashti.

Once the plan was set, it would have been suicide for me to tell the king it was all wrong. But this new queen, Esther, was an obvious commoner. Then, to complete the catalogue of inappropriate characteristics for elevation to royalty, she not only had no noble family, she also actually had no family at all – she was an orphan!

She had been raised by a cousin, Mordechai, who I would nominate as one of the most irritating persons ever. He installed himself by the gate of the palace, ostensibly to be available to advise his charge, Queen Esther. (It makes me want to gag, putting “Queen” together with “Esther.”) This Mordechai character made a point of disrespecting me by failing to bow. Something about “against his religion.” That gave me an idea. Esther, incidentally, had a Hebrew name, Hadassah.

The Jews were a people captured by Nebuchadnezzar when he destroyed their temple and capital city. We Persians conquered Babylon from Nebuchadnezzar's playboy grandson, Belshazzar. We liberated and allowed many of the Jews to return to Jerusalem. Still, they were at least potential enemies of Persian rule. Anyway, they were enemies of my people, the Amalekites, particularly my branch of it, the Agagites.

The laws of the Medes and the Persians have a unique feature that could be used to advantage by anyone smart and sophisticated enough. Once enacted, a law could not be changed. If one can get the king to buy into something and sign it into law, it becomes permanent. I had mastered both the letter and the spirit of that anomaly and had it all planned out. It helped that Xerxes had no idea of the ethnicity of his queen.

Xerxes completely fell for my argument that the Jewish customs were a threat to law and order in the Empire. The command went out to the 127 provinces to exterminate Jews on the date set by casting the “pur” – the lot. On the advice of my wife, I decided to also plan a special execution for Mordechai and built a 75-foot gallows.

The extermination decree was already on the books. But being continually irritated by Mordechai’s failure to bow before me I went early to the court. I was waiting for an opportunity to bring in my proposal for hanging Mordechai. A steward began calling out saying, “Is any noble in the court?” I was called into the presence of the King. It is important to be called. If you show up un-invited, it can mean instant death!

Xerxes asked me, "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?" Of course, I was thinking it was me. So, I responded, "For the man the king delights to honor, have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head."

Incredibly, he was talking about Mordechai, who had long ago detected some sort of assassination plot and never been properly rewarded. Do you ever get a sinking feeling, like the wheels are starting to come off the chariot? I had to perform what I had suggested, and do it for the hated Jew. That made me more determined to wipe him and his dirty people from the face of the earth.

Things were looking up again when the Queen invited me to a special banquet with the King. Imagine, just Xerxes, Esther and me. Despite the fact that she was a Jew, she was Queen, so this was an unusual honor. Xerxes was effusive towards her with praise and said that he would grant her any request. There should have been better orientation to the law for potential heirs to the throne of Persia because those spur-of-the-moment promises can become fixed law. Esther said she requested that we come back the next day. And when the banquet was served, the king once more made that extravagant promise – it must have been the wine!

This time Queen Esther gave the actual reason for the banquets, "If I have found favor with you, O king, and if it pleases your majesty, grant me my life — this is my petition. And spare my people — this is my request. For I and my people have been sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king." King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, "Who is he? Where is the man who has dared to do such a thing?" Esther said, "The adversary and enemy is this vile Haman."

I felt my heart drop out of my chest and make a splat on the floor. As the king stormed out of the room, I bowed to the queen begging for my life, lost my balance and fell into her lap just as the king came back. The next thing I knew, I was hanging from the 75-foot gallows I had intended for Mordechai.

For some reason I have been allowed to communicate with you, who are apparently some sort of people from the future. I lost my personal encounter with the Jews after victory seemed to be a sure thing. Do you still have trouble with them? Just asking.