

Esther Pt. 2

Esther 3



GOD IN THE SHADOWS

ESTHER

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Last week, Eric talked about God being in the shadows in the Book of Esther; His name not even mentioned in this book. We look instead for hidden messages behind the story to see God's presence. It's there but it's hidden. As we look for God's people in exile in Persia, they are also hidden and don't have a direct connection to God in his temple: there is a tension asking "where is God?" in the middle of this.

Esther's name Hadassah means righteousness and also the goddess of sexuality. She is also hidden as a righteous woman.

In the story, Queen Vashti has been deposed and Haman's plot to harm Mordecai foiled. This is a drama with moments that would not be out of place in a morning soap opera. We want to look at what the writer is drawing out, the hidden things that we don't see today.



This is Rembrandt's version of Esther



Or maybe you like the Veggie Tales version

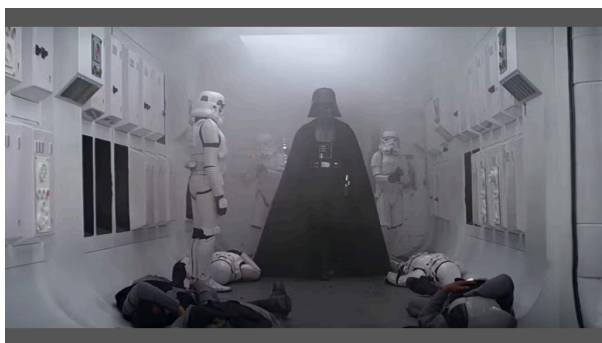
How do we know who the bad guy is in a movie or book?
The writer reveals who the bad guy in various ways:



In Detective Poirot stories, you might not find out who the bad guy is until the end.



This is Mr. Wickham from *Pride and Prejudice*; you kind of like him until the middle of the book/movie when you find out how bad he is. This revelation pushes forward the story.



Sometimes you find out at the beginning of the movie who the bad guy is! His black cape and evil sound make him easily identifiable.

Today we find out in Esther who the real bad guy is: Haman. As I read this next passage, note in your mind the point where you know he is the bad guy.

Esther 3:1-6

1 After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, **the Agagite**, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles. **2** All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor.

3 Then the royal officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's command?" **4** Day after day they spoke to him but he refused to comply. Therefore they told Haman about it to see whether Mordecai's behavior would be tolerated, for he had told them he was a Jew.

5 When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. **6** Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.

The Bad Guy

Haman The Agagite
Exodus 17:8-16
Numbers 24:6-7
Deuteronomy 25:17-19
1 Samuel 15

If you are reading this for the first time, the place is actually much earlier. It's in verse 1: Haman the Agagite! This information tells us more from other places in the Bible.

The people of Israel got hungry and thirsty after they arrived in the desert after crossing the red Sea and God gave them manna and water from a rock. This is an entire group of people from old, young, sick, hurt.

Exodus 17:8-9

8 The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. **9** Moses said to Joshua, “Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.”

Aaron and Hur hold Moses’ hands up so they can defeat the Amalekites.

Later, Balaam could not curse the Israelites:

Numbers 24: 6-7

6 “Like valleys they spread out, like gardens beside a river,
like aloes planted by the LORD, like cedars beside the waters.
7 Water will flow from their buckets; their seed will have abundant water.
“Their king will be greater than Agag; their kingdom will be exalted.

Keep in mind that *Agag* is a title meaning “High one.”

Deut 25:17-18

17 Remember what the Amalekites did to you along the way when you came out of Egypt. **18** When you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and attacked all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God. **19** When the LORD your God gives you rest from all the enemies around you in the land he is giving you to possess as an inheritance, you shall blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!

We find out it’s not just that the Amalekites that came against them, they came behind them to take out those who lagged behind first. They are THE enemy of Israel and wanted to destroy them. Of all the people against Israel, these people are the ones who came against them when they were hungry and thirsty and tired. God says not to forget them.

I Sam 15: 1-9, 14015

1 Samuel said to Saul, “I am the one the LORD sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the LORD. **2** This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. **3** Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.’”

This is a hard passage, even in context, to understand. We see Saul responding to Samuel and attacking the Amalekites.

7 Then Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, near the eastern border of Egypt. 8 He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword. 9 But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs—everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed.

14 But Samuel said, “What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?”

15 Saul answered, “The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God, but we totally destroyed the rest.”

Saul was afraid of his men and he didn’t kill the king. This makes him rejected as king because he doesn’t obey God. Agag is put to death by Samuel.

When we read Esther, Haman is the bad guy: he is the son of Agag, the king of the enemy of the people of God. He is the leader of the Amalekites.

The Good Guy

Mordecai the son of Kish

1 Samuel 9:1-2 There was a Benjamite, a man of standing, whose name was Kish...of Benjamin. Kish had a son named Saul, an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites – a head taller than any of the others.

Mordecai is the good guy, the son of Kish, father of Saul.

Haman	Mordecai
Son of Agag	Son of Kish

You have in Esther is not just a story of Mordecai and Haman, it’s a face off between Kish (Saul, the king of Israel) going against their worst enemy, Agag. This is what is in the shadows that we can easily miss.

Haman seeks to destroy all the Jews and Xerxes casts a lot for the month of Pur followed by an edict throughout the land.

Esther 3:15

The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was **bewildered**.

Please take a moment and imagine Esther as a drama or play on a stage: you see a table with Haman and Xerxes and they give an edict to a courier. After, Haman and Xerxes drink a toast with the whole city

in the background with people going door to door to anxious and bewildered people. This confusion in Susa is turmoil, the same feeling we have when we look at the world around us: pain, sickness, brokenness, ecological disasters, confusion, and ask “Where is God?” It’s not just the big things, it’s the little things. My children are sick this week: there was a night when I slept fitfully with Thomas and he finally pushed on the bowl and said “I don’t want to throw up.” I had to tell him to use the bowl: there was confusion in my life at that moment. Where is God? Do You care?

We are away from home and the Agagite is coming to destroy them: Does God care?

Mark 4:35-41

A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, “Teacher, **don’t you care** if we drown?”



This is like the story from Mark 4: Don’t you care if we drown? Imagine they are in a familiar place and there are stormy winds and they know what could happen, yet Jesus is asleep. Jesus, don’t you care?

We sit in the goodness of Jesus:

Mark 4: 39 He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

40 He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?”

Jesus says he is in the boat with us, he sits in the confusing places with us,

Son of Kish vs. Son of Agag:

You and I are anointed by God as priests: we go through this life as sons and daughters of God to face confusion with Jesus by our side. He says “I’m here, don’t be afraid.”

