

**A CONVERSATION BETWEEN ESTHER 3:1-6
AND A SAMOAN POLICE OFFICER'S
PERSPECTIVE ON SALUTE**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to create a discussion between the story of Mordecai and Haman in Esther 3:1-6 and the modern understanding of the concept salute. As a former Samoan Police officer, the traditions shall also have a local interpretation to it. With the appropriation of narrative critical tools, I shall explore any political plots on the parts of the parties involved where the entire discussion will centre on the questions of why Mordecai refused to bow to Haman which erupted the entire conflict in the book of Esther. The findings will then be discussed in light of a salute perspective, which will also be the contribution of this work to the main question.

DECLARATION

I, *Oata Leिताua* declare that this work has not been used without due acknowledgment of any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in another institution. I also declare that the work has not used any material, heard or read, without proper acknowledgment of the source.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my dear wife *Tuafale*

And our children *Felise*, and *Faaulunaimalua*

And also, to

My beloved parents *Faaulu & Tuifagatoa Felise Leiataua*

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List of Illustrations

Table 1- Textual variants of salute

List of Abbreviations

NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
EFKS	<i>Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa</i>

Introduction

As a former police officer in the Samoan police force, respect offered to the superior officer is a major part of the job. Rankings and respect between rankings is of the utmost importance for the smooth operations of the force and its duties. Normally, the breaking of status and failure to respect the higher authority carries unfavorable consequences. After Esther had been made Queen and Mordecai had spared the Persian king's life, the king advances Haman to be his second in command, bestowing upon him authority and power over all of the king's subjects. However, the tension which is at the center of this book arises when Mordecai does not acknowledge this authority and refuses to bow down to Haman.

This thesis attempts to investigate the narrative of Mordecai and Haman recorded in Esther 3:1-6 from the perspective of a former Samoan Police officer, with a particular focus on the unit tradition act of *salute*. This thesis will attempt to show that Mordecai's actions are political and his use of the monotheistic nature of Yahweh clearly illustrates his political power in the story.

I will use Narrative Criticism to analyse the text – Esther 3:1-6 which will focus on the characters and their roles in light of the plots and strategies they play in the story. In other words, narrative criticism will allow the exegete to dissect all narrative components of the rhetorical units and display their influences on the narrative.¹ Findings from this analysis will then be engaged in a dialogue with a salute perspective which will bring in my experiences of being a Samoan police officer in the past.

¹ Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean," in *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 26-28.

This thesis contains five chapters. Chapter one focuses on my method and approach, i.e. narrative criticism and establishing a salute perspective from a Samoan Police officer's perspective. Chapter two will present a brief review on the literature regarding the text, to examine the current arguments and debates as to the reasons of Mordecai's refusal to bow down. At the end I will also point out the argument to which this paper will add its slight contribution. Chapter three and four shall present the exegesis and narrative analysis, while chapter five will present the dialogue between the narrative analyses and salute perspective. The thesis will present the major findings and conclusions at the end, as well as implications this study will have for the local context and future.

Chapter 1

Methodology and Approach

1.1 Narrative Criticism

A narrative critic attempts to understand a biblical text in its final form, as part of a connected story with a rational purpose. It seeks to understand how the writer arranged the “story” in order to prompt a certain reply from the original audience. As part of this story we will be interested in the interactions between the characters, setting, plot and rhetoric.¹

1.1.1 Character

Characters are those with names, nicknames, and portrayals and are known within the narratives by their words and actions. They are also recipients of what others speak to or about them. They help to unfold the plot of a narrative. In characterisation by Malbon, there is 'telling' and 'showing'. Clearly emphasised, 'telling' is by the author and 'showing' is a product of a reader.²

1.1.2 Setting

As Malbon indicates, setting refers to time and space. It is the question of when and where the event takes place. It determines the reaction of the characters involved in the story. Some settings give a specific location, and others are connotation ally symbolic.³

¹ These four aspects of narrative criticism are derived from Elizabeth Malbon's *communication model of approaching texts*. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean," in *Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 33.; also see David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, eds., *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of the Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 7.

² Malbon, *Narrative Criticism*, 29.

³ Malbon, *Narrative Criticism*, 31; see also Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of the Gospel*, 7.

Setting constitutes worlds like social, cultural and political. Worlds like these can be identified by the reader who reads the narrative or an episode.

1.1.3 Plot

The plot, as Malbon suggests, is a derivative of the interaction between the characters and the setting. In relation to these two elements, things change in time and space as we normally know in the reality of things in the modern world. Consequently, the sequence of events, the order of incidents, its duration and frequency change as well. Since there is a play between characters there is also conflict in suspense. Conflict in Malbon's mind, is the key to the plot unfolding. To reiterate, characters, setting and plot are all elements of a particular story. From the integration of these three principles, evolves the fourth and most important constituent, emphasising story-as-discourse, called the rhetoric.

1.1.4 Rhetoric

Rhetoric in Esther is narrative based.⁴ The integration of characters, settings and the plot offer persuasive ways to read the Book of Esther. The idea, by Malbon, is for the author to persuade the reader, in order for the reader to understand, share and extend what the author implies.⁵ Rhoads, Dewey and Michie advance their meaning by changing the 'what' to 'how', as a way not only to persuade but to 'transform the reader or the audience'.⁶ The audience is labelled as the ideal audience that reads a story in any respective way. Thus for Rhoads, Dewey and Michie, this could be possible since the actions of the actual audience cannot be produced or 'predicted' in the same way that I, as a reader, read Biblical stories. Narrative Criticism and Samoan Hermeneutics are not a new

⁴ Malbon, *Narrative Criticism*, 34.

⁵ Malbon, *Narrative Criticism*, 34-37.

⁶ Malbon, *Narrative Criticism*, 38-39.

undertaking. Other Malua Theological students have incorporated the methodology and hermeneutics to address contextual reading of the biblical text. Toalima⁷ utilises a narrative approach to read Mark 7:24-30 as a seduction of Jesus, whereas Fautanu⁸ dialogues his military experience as a hermeneutic to read the narrative of the Centurion in Mark 15. My use of narrative criticism will provide the structure to facilitate an investigation of all being saved closely.

1.2 Salute Perspective

Oceanic or Pacific hermeneutics has become a more prominent approach to read biblical scripture. For example Rev Dr Vaitusi Nofoaiga uses Vaitusi Nofoaiga uses *tautuaileva* (serving from a space with no restrictions) as a hermeneutical approach into reading the Gospel of Matthew, locating himself in the text from the perspective of service in Samoan culture. Nofoaiga uses his experience from social, cultural, and economic problems among Samoan families.⁹

Another Samoan hermeneutical study is by current MTC Old Testament lecturer Arthur J Wulf. In his doctoral thesis he uses Samoan *Gafataulima* perspective to study Genesis 1:1-2:4a. He offers a reappraisal of Earth from a Gafataulima perspective. The motivation of the study rose out of a personal dilemma concerning his religious beliefs and the reality he experiences daily, especially the tensions between Earth's perfect

⁷ Tutoatasi Toalima, "The Seduction of Jesus: An Alternative Reading of Mark 7: 24-30," (BD Thesis, Malua Theological College, 2017) 1-10.

⁸ Arnold Fautanu, "The role of the centurion in the crucifixion of Jesus": a soldier's reading of Mark 15:1-39," (BTh Thesis, Malua Theological College, 2018), 1-5.

⁹ Vaitusi Nofoaiga, "A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew" *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 81/ 3 (2019); 1.

portrait in the text, and recurring natural disasters that he suffers from in his local Samoan context.¹⁰

In the context of salute there is a sign of respect or *faaaloalo*, which is prominent in the Samoan culture. In this thesis, the sign of respect in 'salute' is also considered an act of bowing which is linked in the act of *faaaloalo*.¹¹

The origins of where the hand salute began from is still questionable truly. Be that as it may, different clarifications attempt to clarify where this culture might likely have come from. Concurring with the Romans, the hand salute came into presence amid a time when there were a few killings among Roman individuals within the late Roman times. Amid this period, any civilian who wished to meet or talk to an open official was supposed to progress with the proper arm raised tall to affirm that they carried no weapon.¹²

At whatever point they met a colleague, the knights having armour continuously utilised their right hands to raise their visors. The hat's removal as a sign of regard among Americans is affirmed to be the root of the salute. It is said that the Americans utilised expelling the cap as a sign of respect a long time back. With time the framework was adjusted so that one, as it was, had to touch his hat. This was changed to the current hand salute with the entry of time. Concurring with the British, the initial British military salute that included tipping one's cap experienced changes since the Cold Stream Watches. At whatever point they passed, they were assumed to bow and make a clap to their caps, as contradicted to the past framework where they constantly removed their hats and

¹⁰ Arthur J. Wulf, "Was Earth Created Good? Reappraising Earth in Genesis 1:1-2: 4a from a Samoa *Gafataulima* Perspective" (PhD Thesis, Auckland: University of Auckland, 2016), 1.

¹¹ Slade defines *faaaloalo* as the core of all Samoan life (*faaSamoa*) which is the respect for the elders. See in Jessica Slade and Pak Yoong. "The Types of Indigenous Knowledge To Be Retained For Young New Zealand Based Samoans: A Samoan Grandparents' perspective." Paper on Pacific Asia Conference on Information systems, (2014), 1-16.

¹² Martin M Winkler, *The Roman salute: cinema, history, ideology*, (Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 2009), 17-41.

supplanted them after they had passed. This activity comes about within the caps experiencing wear and tear. It is expected that this activity gradually advanced to the point where the salute was created. The clarification that was accepted to have a few close affiliations with the truth approximately the military salute was that it was standard for junior military officers to appear to their bosses at whatever point in their nearness through the expulsion of the head adapt. Be that as it may, a few much more lumbering caps were created due to dynamism in military regalia, making it troublesome to expel it as a sign of regard. Visor getting a handle on went with by performing a respectful salute was at that point received to supplant head equip evacuation. This experienced change to what is as of now conventionalised as the hand salute.

Over time, the military salute has had to undergo various changes before settling on the form it is in currently.¹³ The salute is commonly performed by those in lower ranks in the hierarchy and back again from the top down to those lower in ranks.¹⁴

The use of salute in the Samoa police force is no different. It is reserved for the acknowledging of status and ranks in the force. The department is divided into levels. Constables, corporals, sergeant, senior sergeant, inspector, superintendent, assistant commissioner, and then the commissioner heads the entire office. The salute should be given to all commissioner officers. Upon first meeting with the person, this is the time the salute should be covered. This covered salute should be made only once. The salute should also be presented to any cabinet minister. It should be saluted even on the main road where a minister's car passes. This is a show of respect for those in charge. This also applies to any Government department but especially for the Head of State of the Independent State of Samoa.

¹³ Chip Marshall. "Salute to Soldiers." *American Libraries* 35/10 (2004): 44-46.

¹⁴ Jorge R. Coquia, "The Flag Salute Cases Revisited," *Ateneo LJ* 38 (1993): 62.

From experience however, I would point out that salute does not necessarily represent respect as one can salute for the sake of saluting but have no respect for the superior officer. So from a local perspective, this work will uphold the opinion that salute is first and foremost a sign of acknowledging of authority and nothing more. Respect as we have seen in the historical discussion is something which comes later. To salute in acknowledgment and respect is also common, but not all carry the respect element.

Saluting is known to be an act of reciprocity meaning that when the lower ranks salute their superiors, the superiors acknowledge their respect and salute them back. This completes the cycle of acknowledgment and respect.

Summary

Narrative criticism provides the reading structure to critically analyse the text based on characters, settings, plot, and rhetoric. It gives a step-by-step approach to extracting meaning from a text by looking at who the characters are in the text, the setting and changes within, how the storyteller tells the story and the key lesson we should walk away with.

Salute on the other hand from a local perspective will entertain the thought that the practice is merely an acknowledging of authority. While respect is also another element involved in the practice, it is not always present when one salutes a superior officer.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This review will be centre round the question of why Mordecai refused to bow down before Haman. It will expose the current arguments from the scholarly world and will help lay a platform from which this work will launch its argument.

Thomas Oden believes Haman symbolises the arrogance of the powerful of this world, who take advantage of the benefits conceded to them by divine mercy.¹ Haman's actions and plan to destroy the Jews really shows his character not just as a ruler filled with prejudice and anger but also no contempt with other foreign people. Oden also suggests that the role of Haman really shows how much power he had at hand at the time, which reflects how inferior Mordecai's status as a foreigner, a Jew. Mordecai's refusal to bow and show respect to Haman, mirrors this superiority, and deflects that despite how much power Haman holds, Mordecai commits to showing respect to bow down to one entity- that is God of Israel and his forefathers. For Oden it appears that Mordecai's refusal to bow down to Haman was purely religious as he would not bow down to any other. We may take note here that this can be problematic because Jews did in fact do obeisance to their leaders and kings.

Nissan Mindel suggests that the story of Mordecai and Haman is a story that was based on revenge.² Mindel explains that the introduction of the royal decree issued by King Cyrus – which permitted the Jews to rebuild their temple – was met with a protest from the Jews when the Samaritans approached them with a proposal to join forces, which

¹ Thomas C. Oden and Marco Conti, eds. *1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 374-398.

² Mindel N. and N. Kashowsky, "The Complete Story of Purim: Compiled from the Book of Esther, Targum, Talmud and Midrash," (New York: Merkos L'inyonei Chinuch, 1999): 20-35.

resulted in the Jews gathering followers together to upstage an uproar against the king and the Persian law. Mindel also explains that the first interaction between Mordecai and Haman was when they were appointed to represent the Jews and Samaritans. Mordecai cast a shadow over Haman, and Haman never forgave Mordecai for his actions. Once Haman came into power, he had a chance to embarrass Mordecai by making him bow to him. Mordecai never bowed, and Haman's rage grew, and Haman vowed to destroy Mordecai and the Jews. Like Oden above, Mindel entertains the thought that Mordecai refused to bow down for religious purposes. For Mindel, Haman wore on his chest an image of the idol he worshipped. Thus the reason for Mordecai's refusal, despite many warnings, Mordecai was persistent about not worshipping other gods.³

C E Demaray titles this section of book as "The deliverance of the Jews."⁴ One person was able to hold out against the Haman. Mordecai, the Jew, did not bow to the Haman, nor did he reverence him. This could have been because he was a descendant of the Amalekites, or he was simply not able to participate in the obeisance because he was a loyal Jew. To see if Mordecai's matters would be resolved, the servants of the king asked Haman if he would stand by Mordecai's conduct. Haman then decided that he would destroy the entire Jewish nation in the Persian Empire if it was possible to do so.⁵

Tony Evans titles this section as "The Tension builds, a threatened disaster' which starts off with entailing who Haman is and his background."⁶ There is no mention of Esther in this section of the book however, she is mentioned before and after. At this stages, the

³ Nissan Mindel, *The Complete Story of Purim*, 20-35.

⁴ C E Demaray, "Esther" in *Beacon Bible commentary*, Vol 2 (Kansas City, Missouri: Beacon Hill Press, 1965) 661-665.

⁵ C E Demaray, *Esther*, 661-662.

⁶ Tony Evans, "Esther" in *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary*. (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2019), 781-791.

whole debacle of Mordecai not paying homage to Haman because he refused to give honour to an enemy of God. Evans continues to express Haman's ego, who could not bare this Jew in Mordecai for being a radical. Haman went from fuming and wanting to kill Moredcai, to a raging mass-murderer who plotted genocide against all Jews.⁷

Johanna Van Wijk-Bos has this section of the book titled; *A decree for destruction-The promotion of Haman*.⁸ Although it is not explicitly stated why Mordecai refused to bow to the king's vizier, it is possible that he did so due to his opposition to Haman. The king's servants were also there to help the two main characters, and they play a vital role in the discussion. They then asked Mordecai why he would not bow to the royal command. After failing to convince him, they tell Haman that Mordecai had told them that he was a Jew. It is believed that this was the reason for his disobedience. Mordecai's lineage might have caused him to behave the way he did, as it was not uncommon for him to bow to those in authority.⁹

Joyce G. Baldwin says, the views presented question motifs of the author as to why some information is disclosed and its purpose to the overall story, for example the fact that Mordecai was regularly found sitting at the Kings gate. Also mentioned is the question of whether the two separate motifs concerning Esther and Mordecai independently been incompletely put together? The suggestion also presented was that When Esther became queen, had Mordecai appointed as a judge or magistrate, a lesser position in the elaborate hierarchy of Persian officials and that she accomplished this without delay. If this is right reasoning 2:19-20 does not merely recapitulate 2:8-10 but

⁷ Tony Evans, *Esther*, 781-791.

⁸ Johanna WH Van Wijk-Bos, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 99-110.

⁹ Van Wijk-Bos, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther*, 99-110.

adds an important incident in the development of the plot. This gives Mordecai the opportunity to overhear what is being said by palace officials as well as have access to the royal officials. Although Mordecai is known as a Jewish, there isn't a reason for the interference to be made that Esther is also Jewish. This would result in her identity being kept secret to avoid any rising trouble due to the conflict between the Jewish and Persian people. Mordecai's promotion resulted in Haman's incitement and later resulted in his death. The failed plot to kill the king was common in this era and had Mordecai not overheard the Kingsman's plot, the assassination of the king would have gone through.¹⁰

Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman, is similar to Vashti's refusal to appear before the king according to Lewis Paton.¹¹ Paton has taken the final clause of v. 4 "for he had told them that he was a Jew", as referring to Mordecai's refusal to bow. However, it comes too late in the grammatical structure to refer to Mordecai's refusal and makes no sense historically. Similarly, Jews also bowed to their superiors, and there is no Jewish law against it. Moreover, Mordecai could not have functioned as a royal courtier had he made a general refuse to bow, meaning he is refusing to Haman in particular. The LXX claims that Haman demanded divine honours, which Mordecai would not render. In the Targum, it states that Haman wore an idol pinned to his breast and if Mordecai bowed down to him, he would be guilty of idolatry. However, Paton also distinguishes that it may have been Mordecai's arrogance and petty self-seeking. His fellow servants question him concerning his refusal resulting in their report to Haman; he had informed them that he was Jew. The author implies that the other servants see this as a contest of wills between Haman and Mordecai, and they pit the two against each other to see who will prevail.

¹⁰ Joyce G Baldwin, *Esther: An Introduction and Commentary* (Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 30-49.

¹¹ Beverly Robert Gaventa and David Petersen, "Esther 3:1-15 Haman's Plot to Destroy the Jews" *The New Interpreter's Bible* Vol. 760 (2010): 893-897.

Haman evidently had not noticed Mordecai's insult until then, but now that it had been brought to his attention, his political agenda then began to take place not only against Mordecai, but the Jewish people also.¹²

David Clines talks about Mordecai's natural pride as being the sole reason that brought out into the open his act of civil disobedience, which is in contrast with his loyal behaviour in 2:21-23. There is a tension between outward and inward obedience, between genuine and uncritical loyalty to the state. The issue Clines believes is whether Jewishness can exempt one from obedience to the Persian laws. This is an interesting narrative trait that Mordecai's public defiance cannot be observed privately by Haman but must be the subject of public deposition. Haman has studied the king well, and just as Vashti had disobeyed the king, Haman conveyed in his leadership with extreme penalties also. Haman's supposition that all Jews are grounded with the same ideology of Mordecai is one that can't be questioned because the novelistic thing to do would be to institute an empire-wide test of loyalty. The author however does not do this but cannot resist themselves from writing Haman's thoughts on "beneath his dignity". Hence, Clines seems to believe that the political agenda of Haman and his motivation is purely a political stance against not Mordecai as a person, but as well as a nation who he believes it politically against his ruler ship, represented by Mordecai not bowing down.¹³

Frank Gaebelien suggests two reasons for Mordecai's refusal to bow down to Haman; it would have been an act of idolatry, or he refused to bow before the hereditary enemy of Israel. The officials informed Haman of Mordecai's insolence to see whether it would be tolerated, but it is unlikely that Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman was cause

¹² Gaventa and Petersen, "Esther 3:1-15 Haman's Plot to Destroy the Jews" (2010): 893-897.

¹³ David Clines, *The New Century Bible Commentary: Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 291-293.

of a claim to divine honour by Haman. The Targum suggests that the most probably reason he refused was because of Mordecai's pride; no self-respecting Benjaminite would bow before a descendant of the ancient Amalekite enemy of the Jews. Gaebelein says this insinuated the feeling in Haman to not only destroy Mordecai, but also to succeed in what Saul failed, to destroy all his enemies.¹⁴

Bowing down to those in authority was traditionally not forbidden to Mordecai's community of Jews. Therefore, his refusal to bow down seems to be more of a political push for his lineage. As Vashti's minor offense had caused diplomatic controversy on the part of the king, so does Haman react to Mordecai's behaviour. Verses 5 and 6 refer to Haman's name three times, and Mordecai's four times, highlighting the implacable opposition to one another. Also important to mention is the service that Mordecai had done for the king, but in this chapter it had seemed to be forgotten by the author, for the king appoints someone else to high office. Mordecai's service to the king is overlooked by Haman, and him being a descendant of Agag the Amalekite king, archenemy of Saul. By lineage therefore, Mordecai and Haman are set in opposition to one another. Therefore, the two political stances are produced in this very section of the book.¹⁵

The author skilfully introduces the villain, who sets a seemingly inescapable trap for the Jews. Although the Masoretic Text does not clearly state why Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman, it does imply with Haman being a descendant of Agag the Amalekites. Mordecai and his reason may seem to the reader to be inadequate for his

¹⁴ Frank Gaebelein, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version: 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1988), 811-812.

¹⁵ Johanna Van Wijk-Bos, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 116-117.

stand, but ethnic and religious prejudices are often absurd to those who do not share them. This was reciprocated though by Haman when Mordecai revealed his Jewishness to Haman. He immediately initiated his personal vendetta against the entire Jewish people. Throughout the whole narrative therefore, Haman's accusations of the Jews was diabolically clever in its construction, proceeding as it did from the truth. Hence, the diabolical opposing forces between Mordecai and Haman.¹⁶

Gordon Wenham says Jewish readers would see a recapitulation of the battle between Amalekites and Saul in the conflict of Mordecai and Haman. It was a battle Mordecai was determined to win in light of his lineage and his ancestral roots. Now Mordecai disapproved of the appointment and so refused to bow down to Haman, even though he must've known that he was asking for trouble, especially when royal officials reported him to Haman. Now the fact that Mordecai was a Jew would not have prevented him from honouring those in authority, because there was no rule to it, but adherence to the law of God gave Jews an allegiance higher than mere human jurisdiction, and thus tended to develop independence of judgement. In saying this, Haman took his time in planning his strategy for revenge, not content with only the life of Mordecai, he plotted against the entire nation of Jews, setting a precedent in anti-Semitism. Haman's political stance was bloodthirsty and totally unscrupulous.¹⁷

Furthermore, David Noel Freedman also states that the ancient conflict between Israel and Amalek is portrayed as continuing in the contest between Haman and Mordecai. Mordecai is portrayed as a relative of King Saul, and the Masoretic texts provide evidence that Haman was a descendant of Agag, the ancient king of Amalekites.

¹⁶ Carey Moore, *The Anchor Bible: Esther: Introduction, Translated and Notes* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 34-44.

¹⁷ Gordon Wenham, et al. *New Bible Commentary* (England: Intervarsity Press, 1954), 447-448.

In the LXX, Haman is treated as a figure of conflict against the Israelites. He is never described as an Agatite but rather as either a Bugean, perhaps referencing to a famous friend of Alexander the Great, or as a Macedonian. Therefore, Haman would be seen as a hated Greek by later Jewish audiences who still remembered the trouble caused by the Greek rule. Freedman therefore emphasises this conflict between Haman and Mordecai.¹⁸

Summary

The overall consensus of the review suggests that Haman's character was full of hatred and anger because of the fact that Mordecai would not bow. Furthermore, his ethnicity as a Jew was a more triggering factor which not only enraged him but it took him to the next level where he wanted all Jews eliminated, we are talking genocide here. Now the conflicting lineages of these two characters are ultimately the result of the dispute throughout the whole book. The literature review indicates clearly that the war between the Amalekites and the Israelites was portrayed here in the selected text between Haman and Mordecai. Their political stances for their respective people showcases in their anger for one another, something that the review points out in its entirety. Furthermore, the non-mention of Esther in the narrative selected text does not necessarily mean she is inactive in the book, but was also a vital character who is behind the scenes.

It is clear that Mordecai's refusal to bow is political in the views of many. On the other hand, it is religious in the sense that Mordecai acted merely in fear of breaking Jewish laws and commandments. This work attempts to show its support for the former where a salute view would present the acknowledgement and non-receptive actions towards authority as political.

¹⁸ David Noel Freedman, et al. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* vol. 6 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 33.

Chapter 3

Exegesis A – Esther 3:1-6

The title of this book comes from its main character, Esther, making it similar to many other Old Testament books. The writer does not necessarily identify himself in the text, but references show that he was familiar with many Persian cultures and literature. In addition, the writer seems like he was a possible eyewitness throughout the events in the book. The idea of Esther as the likely author has not been supported in scholarly work mainly because female writers in that time were uncommon. A suggested time frame of its publication could have been any time after 473 B.C.E, which was the year that the Jews defended themselves and instituted the Feast of Purim, performed as the last historical event in the book. Interestingly, God does not appear in the entire text of Esther and does not mention Israel's land.

Esther 3:1-6, in light of this paper, holds tremendous value, and using narrative criticism, the characters of this passage must be explored. It is only then one will understand the movement of the characters as well as portray the meaning of the passage.

3.1. Structure & Framework

We shall discuss these chiasms which can show signs of what the author may have implied for the original audience.

3.1.1. Chiasm One

A1: Chs 1-2: Introduction Banquet: 1.3, 5, 9; 2.18, 2.18

B1: Ch 3: Haman's hatred for Mordecai & the Jews 'pur' 3.7; edict 3.14

C1: Ch 4: Mordecai & Esther plan a rescue

D1: Ch 5: Esther's 1 st banquet Banquet: 5.4, 5, 6, 8, 14

E: Ch 6: The king's Sleepless Night climax

D2: Ch 7: Esther's second banquet Banquet: 6.14, 7.2, 7, 8

C2: Ch 8: Mordecai & Esther's rescue plan Banquet: 8.17; edict 8.13

B2: Ch 9: Haman's hatred reversed Banquet 9.17, 18, 19, 22; 'pur', 9.27

A2: Ch 10: Conclusion:¹⁹

First, the most important assessment we can see in this chiasm is the fact that the central place is placed on the king of Persia. In terms of power struggles and driving force in these stories, the Persian ruler would definitely be very powerful. Despite how the author (who really is in power) may portray the imperial ruler, the influencing power of this ruler cannot be underestimated especially if all characters in the story appear to be struggling for his attention and endorsements.

It is also evident in the chiasm the conflict between Haman and Mordecai. We may also take note that Haman's hatred also disappears in the end, furthermore Mordecai and Esther are portrayed as co-planners. This will be interesting as in our text, Esther does not appear yet is portrayed as a co-conspirator with Mordecai.

3.1.2. Chiasm Two

A Banquet of the king (1:1-22)

B Esther becomes queen (2:1-18)

C Contribution of Mordecai (2:19-23)

D Haman undertakes to destroy the Jews (3:1-15)

E Esther agrees to help the Jews (4:1-17)

F Esther's banquet (5:1-14)

X The honour of Mordecai (6:1-14)

¹⁹ Extraction from <https://www.stpeterscollege.org.uk/UserFiles/File///Esther.pdf>

F' Haman's downfall (7:1-10)

E' Esther saves the Jews (8:1-8)

D' Pleasure of Jews (8:9-17)

C' Destruction of the Enemies of the Jews (9:1-19)

B' The feast of Purim inaugurated (9:20-32)

A' The honour of Mordecai (10:1-3)²⁰

While this chiasm maintains the same centre, the person of Mordecai is more prominent. While the imperial ruler remains to be the one with power in the story, it is Mordecai who is now receiving it here. Does this mean that the real centre of the book is the person of Mordecai? What role then does Esther play in the story? Just how powerful is Esther? We shall now look into the various characters and discuss their situations and movements in the text.

3.2 Esther

Esther is not mentioned in the parameters of the chosen text, but she plays an important role in the relationship between the characters throughout the narrative of Esther as a whole, so even within the parameters of the text, her influence dwells within. She is also affected by the conflict between Haman and Mordecai. After the event where Mordecai refuses to bow down, Haman plans to kill not just Mordecai but all of the Jews in the empire, obtaining permission from the king to do so. When Mordecai finds out about this decree, he informs Esther and tells her to intercede, leading to a chain of events that successfully saves the Jewish people in the empire.²¹

²⁰ Extracted from http://www.bible.literarystructure.info/bible/17_Esther_e_1.html

²¹ Hershey H Friedman, and Linda Weiser Friedman, "The book of Esther: Lessons in leadership," *Shepherd Journal of Practical Leadership* 6/1 (2012).

Esther's role within the narrative plays a vital role in understanding our text, as she can be seen as the saviour for Mordecai, but also the downfall of Haman and his decree. Therefore, the events that follow the refusal of the bowing down of Mordecai ultimately is a narrative that relies solely on Esther and her decision-making. Tri Winarni talks about the important and vital role played by Esther and character development that experienced self-transformation when she took the decision to approach the king.²²

Ronald W Pierce writes that there is a political motif which appears to be two fold with Esther's relationship with Mordecai. These motifs are also referred to as 'personal reversals- national reversals'²³ which also displays unique literary features in the book of Esther, as these motifs are interwoven into a rich chiasmic pattern which only seen if we are able to identify the motifs.²⁴ The first women's feasts (B) were held during the first year of the reign, and the two personal reversals that occurred involved the dethroning of Vashti and the enthroning of Esther. The first of these was due to her disloyalty to Ahasuerus, while the second was due to her loyalty to Mordecai (B1).

The two personal reversals that occurred were set aside against the national reversal that the Jewish people experienced due to Mordecai's disloyalty to Haman (B). This phenomenon repeated itself in Esther's second feast, (B1) where a personal reversal divides the two festivals, just as it did in the first one. The personal reversal that occurred involved Mordecai's replacement of Haman was also due to his loyalty to Ahasuerus. This concept is similar to the "replacement" dimension of the earlier instances of Esther and Vashti, where the former was loyal to the latter. The second national reversal, which was

²² Tri. Winarni "The Self-Transformation of Esther as a Jewish in The Book of Esther in The Jerusalem Bible: A Psycho-Spiritual Case Study." PhD diss., PROGDI FAKULTAS SASTRA, 2004.

²³ This phenomenon is a pattern that presents itself in two major pairs, with the first half of the first pair subdivided further into two parts.

²⁴ Ronald W Pierce, "The Politics of Esther and Mordecai: Courage or Compromise?" *Bulletin for biblical research* 2 (1992): 75-89.

also due to Esther's loyalty to Mordecai, was an opposite of the first one, where the latter's disloyalty led to the threat of genocide.²⁵

From these personal reversal-national reversal phenomenon, it is evident that these motifs also highlight the various political agendas that Mordecai and Esther had in mind.

3.3 King Ahasuerus of Persia

The first character mentioned in this passage is king Ahasuerus, whose name resembles "King Headache" in Hebrew. Alexander Green refers to him as an idiotic ruler who could not make any decisions for himself. He was ruled by his love for honour and his uncontrolled passions.²⁶ He spent most of his time indulging in large drinking affairs and lusting for women in ways explained throughout the book of Esther. But perhaps one of the greatest desires of Ahasuerus is that of power.

Furthermore, not only is he mentioned in Esther 3:1-6, but he is more importantly mentioned in the very first verse of the Book of Esther. It is an emphasis on the whole work to some extent depending on this powerful ruler who governed a large world empire. This initial chapter also teaches the regime and empire were an Oriental despotism or tyranny, where all the power was centralised and determined by the wishes of king Ahasuerus.²⁷

Now his character movement within the text indeed describes this attitude of his. The first mention of his name is followed by the word גָּדַל (gidal) "to grow, become great," which describes his actions and what he does to the status of Hamm. Here we see

²⁵ Pierce, *The Politics of Esther and Mordecai*, 75-89.

²⁶ Alexander Green, "Power, Deception, and Comedy: The Politics of Exile in the Book of Esther," *Jewish Political Studies Review* (2011), 10-20.

²⁷ Green, *Power, Deception, and Comedy*, 24.

the status of Haman rise from law to higher level. It is only a king that has the power and the authority to do so.

Another word used in this passage is commanded צִוָּה (tzivah) which means 'to command'. In Hebrew, it is often used for the instruction from a father to a son, or more often, as in this case, from a king to a servant. The word *shavah* reflects a firmly structured society where the leader is in a firm position to command the people and, in return, expects their obedience. Therefore, this word is used in a high stature nuance, especially in the case of the selected text. It is an assurance of the type of power that king Ahasuerus had at the time. This is further highlighted at the end of the passage in verse 6, where the linguistic used reassures this notion, as verse 6 states, "throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus".²⁸

While it appears clear who the powerful is in the narrative, i.e. the Persian king, the question we would still be interested in is the relation of this power to others in the narrative. Given the limited involvement of the king in the text, does he still hold the power over the narrative at this point?

3.4 Haman

Haman is revealed in this passage and possibly one of the most important. He is often known as Haman the Agagite,²⁹ more famously known for his evil role in the book of Esther, making him the main antagonist of the narrative. An official in the court of the Persian king Haman was the son of Hammedatha the Agagite. In verses 1-6, he plays a vital role in the story. The first mention of Haman is when he is bestowed a status of

²⁸ Shemaryahu Talmon, "Wisdom in the Book of Esther," *Vetus Testamentum* 13, no. Fasc. 4 (1963).

²⁹ André Lacoque, "Haman in the Book of Esther," *Center for Jewish Christian Studies* (Chicago: Chicago Theological Seminary, 1987) 207-222.

leadership.³⁰ Furthermore, his name in etymology has been equated with the Persian name *Omanes* recorded by Greek historians, therefore making this name a priestly title and not a proper name.

He is mentioned six times within these 6 verses, and this is an implication of what his intentions and ultimate plans are: Firstly, it is the mentioning of Haman gaining promotion from the king himself, Ahasuerus and not only is his name mentioned, but his genealogical background is also mentioned. Secondly, Haman's name is mentioned after this promotion as someone who everyone was to bow down to and obey. This is an obvious post-promotion act often given to those in power and rulers. Thirdly, his name is mentioned when the servants after days of trying to convince Mordecai to bow down, tell Haman. Fourth, Haman is stated to have seen Mordecai not bowing down or obeying him as mentioned in verse five, and in the same verse is the fifth mention of his name, describing the actions and the feelings that he had at the time; he was infuriated. Finally, Haman's intentions are seen in verse 6, where he plots to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai. It is in direct correlation with the previous mentions of Haman in this passage, and moreover is a culmination of the events prior.

In Rabbinic tradition, he is considered to be an archetype of evil and a persecutor of Jews. He became the center of many Talmudic legends. He was also an astrologer with approximately 365 counsellors, but none as good as his wife Zeresh who proposed the idea to Haman to have a gallows built for Mordecai assuring him that it was the only way to get his point across.³¹ Knowing these facts builds a strong argument in the case of this paper as to why Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman.

³⁰ Denise Flanders, "Freeing Ahasuerus, Haman, and Mordechai: Liberating the Oppressor in the Book of Esther," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 71, no. 1 (2020).

³¹ Joshua Berman, "Aggadah and Anti-Semitism: The Midrashim to Esther 3: 8," *Judaism* 38, no. 2 (1989).

These attributes about Haman are a clear confirmation of the type of person he is. Even tracing Haman's name tells a story alone, i.e. promotion, bow down is due to new status, Mordecai does not bow down and people advising him to bow, Haman notices Mordecai's refusal and infuriates him, Haman plots to destroy Mordecai and his people. The movement of Haman's character solidifies the claim that he believes that he holds the power. Perhaps this very attitude and perspective is the reason as to why Mordecai refused to bow; because Haman was not the one who held the power.

3.5 Mordecai

Mordecai is one of the main personalities in the Book of Esther and is the son of Jair, of the tribe of Benjamin. His name is uncertain in origin, but it is widely regarded as identical to the name *Marduk*³² which is one of the names of up to four Persian court officials in thirty texts.³³ He resided in Susa, which is often known as the metropolis of Persia and more often now called Iran. He had adopted his orphaned cousin Esther (Hadassah) and nurtured her as if she was his own child. In light of this paper, I believe that Mordecai's movement within the text is the true focal point of this paper.

The first mention of Mordecai in the selected passage is his defiance in the act of bowing to Haman, something that was compulsory for the kingdom to do to those higher in authority. This is important to note as the implication or the misinterpretation seen in this verse is the idea that Haman refused to bow down. However, the Masoretic text, the

³² *Marduk* is the patron god of Babylon, or the Babylonian king of the gods, who presided over justice, compassion, healing, regeneration, magic, and fairness. He is also referred to as the storm god and agricultural deity.

³³ Adam Silverstein, "The Book of Esther and the Enūma Elish," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 69, no. 2 (2006).

Hebrew *Megillah*³⁴ we have today is obscure. Mordecai gives no answer, but instead only tells them that he was a Jew (v.4).³⁵

The following mentioning of Mordecai is from the perspective of Haman, who in this instance sees with his own eyes that what the servants had told him was true. Now knowing Mordecai and his people, he then goes on to plot a disastrous plan against Mordecai and the Jews.

3.5.1 Mordecai's Refusal to bow down

The Hebrew word *kara'* means “to bow down.” It is however also applicable to bending in general and to bowing in worship or obedience, and it clearly refers to kneeling. In the Jewish setting, bowing is a sign of respect and is done at certain points in Jewish service.³⁶ By tradition, in the Temple of Jerusalem, kneeling was a major part in regular service, but it is not active in modern Jewish service.

Respect plays a big part in the life of Mordecai, and the refusal of Mordecai to bow down to Haman is considered a sign of Mordecai dis-respecting Haman in this case. One of the factors important to explore is the relationship between Mordecai and Haman. The Talmud tells us that the wording in Deuteronomy 25:18 literally means Amalek happened upon the Jews. This, the rabbi, explains the personality of Amalek; they are representative of the philosophy of chance, fate and destiny, something that opposes Jewish rituals and philosophy of divine control from God. The indifferences between these two nations can also be seen way back in the story of Esau and Jacob, with the genealogical roots of the Amalekites stemming from Esau whose grandson was Amalek, is known for notoriously

³⁴ The *Megillah* is the Hebrew word for the scroll on which the biblical Book of Esther is traditionally written.

³⁵ Talmon, "Wisdom in the Book of Esther," 12.

³⁶ Andi Young, *The Sacred Art of Bowing: Preparing to Practice* (SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2003).

attacking the Israelites from Jacob's lineage at Rephidim on their route from Egypt to Mt. Sinai. Now Haman is a descendant of the line of Amalekites, meaning there was always an indirect friction between Haman and Mordecai. This then causes a conflict between the two mind sets and philosophical differences.³⁷

3.5.2 Only Bow Down to God

The Greek version of Esther (Septuagint) presents Mordecai's defense along these lines. If Mordecai was to obey the rule of the Persian king and bow to Haman, he would betray his allegiance to the King of kings, the God of the Jewish people. The Aramaic *Targum Sheni*, does not mention an idol but argues that it is inappropriate that 'the Jew' should bow to a mere mortal man.³⁸ In Esther 3, in response to the king's servant's question, no answer directly from Mordecai is given in the Masoretic text. Therefore, in both these texts we can see the anger Mordecai portrays here, bowing to a man is in fact a form idolatry presenting a challenge to monotheism, making all Jews obliged to pay their respect to God and no one else. So, in a sense, the actions of Mordecai in this text are in fact an act of 'respect' towards God.

This chapter has gathered necessary information using narrative criticism to draw out any implications within Esther 3:1-6. The movement and the narration of the characters paints a clear picture with the ultimate focal point on the exact reason as to why Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman. It is clear that there is friction or conflict between the two that had birthed years prior to the event that is mentioned here. A long line of conflict not only between the Amalekites and the Israelites, but as well as Esau and Jacob. However, it is evident here that although Mordecai tends to show a sign of

³⁷ Lacoque, "Haman in the Book of Esther," 222.

³⁸ Elias J Bickerman, "Notes on the Greek Book of Esther" (paper presented at the Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research, 1951).

disrespect, it is important that from his perspective, he is respecting his God, worshipping and acknowledging the superior God, by not bowing down to Haman. This in itself, is Mordecai 'saluting' God as a sign of respect and acknowledgement.

Chapter 4

Exegesis B – Esther 3:1-6

Various aspects of the narrative elements have been discussed in detail in the chapter on method and approach. Elements such as characters, setting, plots have been dissected and their influence and contribution to the story is what makes and shapes the story. The initial stages of the narrative analysis have already begun in the previous chapter, this chapter continues this analysis focussing more on its rhetorical features and possible intentions, i.e. why and how the story was written. To analyse the narrative as a rhetorical unit I have selected Mark Allan Powell's approach into guiding my interpretation.¹ Powell has a list of questions which I will utilise to see the rhetoric of the narrative or rather the possible purpose as a coherent whole. These questions also discussed in the subheadings below.²

4.1. Rhetorical devices and narrative patterns

The rhetoric elements have been identified in chapter one. In this section my rhetoric and narrative analysis will be based on the narrative as a whole. Powell refers to Aristotle's theory of the three species of rhetoric;

- 1- Judicial, which accuses or defends.

¹ Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative criticism*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995) 131-136.

² Powell uses these questions to compile the analysis of the narrative as one unit. 1. What rhetorical devices are employed in the reporting of this episode? Can intentional symbolism or irony be detected? What narrative patterns are used in structuring this passage and its immediate context; 2. What does this episode, as understood within the context of the entire narrative, reveal about the implied author? What values, ideas, priorities, or preferences seem to govern the way in which this story is told? See above; 3. What effect does the narrative seem to assume that this episode will have upon its readers? What elements of the narrative's discourse contribute to the production of this effect? Powell, *What is Narrative criticism*, 134.

- 2- Deliberative, which gives advice; and
- 3- Epideictic, which praises or blames.³

Through these three species of rhetorical I will analyse the narrative.

4.1.1 Judicial

There is an irony of this narrative in Mordecai refusing to bow down to Haman. This is because we see two sides of Judicial played in the narrative. Haman and the king's servants accuse Mordecai of disobedience and Mordecai defends his faith in God. His belief as Jew that he only worships and bows down to God of his ancestors. Haman being the king, already situates this narrative as Judicial because he accuses Mordecai of not following orders. This was all plotted by the king's servants who appear to have put Mordecai in this situation. They knew he was a Jew, therefore they had to take it to the next level, knowing for a fact that it will enrage Haman.

When it comes to defending beliefs, Mordecai is without doubt the main character here. Despite the king's servants knowing of who he was, he wasn't afraid that they were aware he was a Jew. This shows grave loyalty, commitment, and courage through Mordecai as he stands his ground not only to the king's servants, but also to Haman. He deliberately knew what was at risk if he did not bow, however his faith in God prevailed.

4.1.2 Deliberate

Arguably there is no advice seeking or advice been given in this narrative. If we pay attention to the text, there is no evidence of dialogue with Mordecai. There is a mention that he told the king's servants he was Jew, but there is no direct speech or words from Mordecai. This reveals that Mordecai was perhaps in an environment where his voice was never heard, he was oppressed. This can be supported due to the facts that they

³ Powell, *What is Narrative criticism*, 24-25.

were in war with the Amalekites at the time.⁴ There was a struggle between the two nations in the Jews and Amalekites.

4.1.3 Epideictic

Mordecai has been blamed by the king's servants of being Jew, in the eyes of the Amalekites he was an enemy, an outsider. This was already a reason to not just blame but also target Mordecai. As mentioned earlier, Mordecai is seen as a victim, person of interest; he has no voice. The dialogue seems to be a one-way street. In addition, the words used by Haman and his servants depict an aggressive and oppressive nature of the Amalekites. The Hebrew verb *ישתחוה* (*u-mish-tah-cha-veh*) is from a rare stem formulation known as hishtaphel, which mainly applies to the root *חווה* (*mid*). It is similar to the hiphil stem as the causative action is from the subject (in this case it is Haman and his servants) directed to Mordecai. This verb is translated to 'to do obeisance' which also is used to command people with lower socio-economic statuses, but also slaves. This gives us an idea of what Mordecai is facing with, as he is seen as an inferior as soon as he did not bow down.

4.2 Author(s)

Tracing the author's origins and background is dear to this scholarly work, as it may provide meaning to the context of the passage as a literary whole. Interestingly, the Book of Esther became the last of the *Tanakh* canonised by the Sages of the Great Assembly.⁵

⁴ Jonathan Grossman, *Esther: The Outer Narrative and the Hidden Reading* Vol. 6. (Pennsylvania: Eisenbrauns Penn State Press, 2011) 89.

⁵ The Sages of the Great Assembly (Anshei Knesset HaGedolah) have had the merit of being the first to reside in the Land of Israel after the destruction of the first Temple. They were believed to be the spiritual guides of an entire nation during the second Temple era and were composed of 120 members. They were the leaders of the people when they returned to the Land of Israel after the Babylonian Exile. AE Morris, "The Purpose of the Book of Esther," *The Expository Times* 42, no. 3 (1930).

According to Ran Zadok, it was a redaction that the Great Assembly made of an original text by Mordecai, which dates back to the 4th century B.C.E. Therefore, it is possible that Mordecai wrote the book. However, there are a few irrational explanations, like when the writer distinguishes himself from Mordecai in 9:20 and 23. The author's intention is clear and would have been a source of encouragement for the Jews who returned to the Promised Land after the exile. Consequently, Ran Zadok states that many scholars believe a Jew may have written it for this purpose and perhaps it was a Jew that had returned to the land from Susa, where the events recorded in the book occur.⁶

A more close reading of the narrative tends to direct the spotlight onto Mordecai as if he was to blame. This is evident through their commands and words such as "Why do you disobey the king's command?" (Esth 3:3) and "When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or do obeisance to him, Haman was infuriated." (Esth 3:5). The author's influence on the narrative really zooms in on Mordecai as if he was at fault. Without reading further into the chapter and its scenarios, perhaps this was the point the author wanted to make. To really epitomize Mordecai's risk-taking character to reveal something more significant later on. This is questioned by Chris Seeman as to whether Mordecai's refusal to bow before Haman was part of God's plan, or whether it was an unwarranted act of self-assertion, a colossal blunder whose genocidal backlash required Gods intervention to undo.⁷ However, I do argue that with the intervention of God, even without its mention in the book of Esther, from the lens of the author is more so from the perspective of Mordecai's risk and respect for God. Gregory Goswell states that God is left out in order to foreground the initiative and the bravery of the Jewish protagonists

⁶ Ran Zadok, "Notes on Esther," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 98/1 (1986): 1-7.

⁷ Chris. Seeman "Enter the dragon: Mordecai as agonistic combatant in Greek Esther." *Biblical theology bulletin* 41, no. 1 (2011): 3-15.

with the implied ethic that believers should act with resolve and wisdom in a situation of crisis; to embody God.⁸

4.3 Message for Audience

The message based on rhetorical unit is that whether blamed, accused or been convicted doing something despite it being against your faith and belief, stand your ground. It can be easy for anyone to be put in Mordecai's shoes but to do what Mordecai do, is proven hard. In the midst of death, Haman was plotting to kill not just Mordecai but more Jews with him. This even makes Mordecai's case even impossible when it comes to reality. In saying that, Mordecai was true to his God, and he might not have bowed down to Haman, but he definitely did acknowledge the God of his ancestors.

4.4 The Acknowledgment of God

Mordecai's refusal to bow down to Haman confirms him acknowledging God through his faith and loyalty. Without reading into the end of the story and its successful ending of how Esther plays her part, it is crucial in our world today to know who we worship and who we bow down and pay homage to.

4.4.1 Power and authority- Who is being acknowledged?

The characters identified in chapter three have their own motives based on their actions and sayings throughout the text. What is known is that Haman illustrates an angry, enraged and a character filled with fury. It was his command that Mordecai was to bow down and pay homage to him, including everyone else who was inferior of him. As the

⁸ Gregory R. Goswell, "Keeping God out of the Book of Esther." *Evangelical Quarterly* 82/2 (2010): 1-5.

narrative unfolds, Mordecai's refusal to bow down and in this case show respect and acknowledge Haman, leads to a contradictory conclusion of the story in the book of Esther.⁹

In the selected text, we can say that Haman was in power as he directed everyone to bow down and pay respects to him. Arguably, this idea can be rebutted because of Mordecai, he was not intimidated by Haman which was evident through he was refusal to bow down or in this study's case, he refused to acknowledge Haman. Why? Because of his loyalty to the one and only God who he pays homage to, the God of his ancestors, God Abraham, Isaac and Jacob- God of Israel.¹⁰

So, who is power after this narrative? From Mordecai's view, it was God. Mordecai's failure to bow down to Haman was his act of acknowledging God.¹¹ This gesture is by far a heroic act as Mordecai remained loyal and committed to his God in the face of death and persecution.

To support this argument of Mordecai acknowledging God, we see in the end of the book of Esther a contradictory end to Haman's life when he ends up being hung on the same pole he had plotted. This can be seen as a result of those who treat respect and reverence to God as a mockery. Haman knew Mordecai was a Jew, a Jew who only

⁹ Esther 6:12-13 Then Mordecai returned to the king's gate, but Haman hurried to his house, mourning and with his head covered. 13 When Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him, his advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, "If Mordecai, before whom your downfall has begun, is of the Jewish people, you will not prevail against him but will surely fall before him." (NRSV) Salute occurs 4 times in the biblical text, 1 Sam 13:10, 1 Sam 25:6, 1 Sam 25:14, and 1 Sam 30:21. We can see that that salute in these references refer more to a form of blessing or extending peace to the other party. Whereas the salute approach used in this study is more an act of homage, reverence and respect.

¹⁰ Elias J Bickerman, "Notes on the Greek book of Esther." In *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, 20 (1951): 101-133.

¹¹ Andi Young, *The Sacred Art of Bowing: Preparing to Practice* (SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2003), 5-21.

worshipped one God. However, his controlling nature in the narrative did not see the true power of God that ended him.¹²

We cannot ignore Esther's character and her role before and after the selected text. Her personal-reversal motifs as identified by Pierce can be seen as her personal and political motive in the story. She can be seen as a loyal Jew to her fellow Jews in Mordecai. She can be seen as a supporting character when only exploring this narrative, perhaps also supports why she is not mentioned in this chapter. Again, she necessarily is not mentioned but she is as crucial Mordecai to the Jews as she remains loyal to Mordecai and most importantly God.¹³

4.4.2 Paying Respect- Who is Acknowledging?

In this narrative it is obvious that Mordecai was subjected to bow down to Haman. It is evident in the text that Mordecai refused to. We have identified in the exegesis that his refusal to bow down to Haman, was his confirmation of paying homage to God. In hindsight, we can argue that Mordecai had acknowledged God as a result of his refusal to bow down to Haman.

Summary

The rhetoric analysis has facilitated in focusing on the narrative unit as one rhetorical unit. In this chapter, the narrative features (e.g., setting, plot, characters, etc) were dissected and analysed individually. The scope was to see the narrative as one piece focusing on the messages portrayed through its rhetorical features. Mordecai's oppressive situation could have made him bow down however, his faith and belief in God is what

¹² Eliezer Segal. *The Babylonian Esther Midrash: A Critical Commentary*. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994) 105-143

¹³ Pierce. *The Politics of Esther and Mordecai*, 75-89.

made him stand out. We see the aggression and rage from Haman and his servants depicted in their words as a glimpse of what type of scenario Mordecai was exposed to.

Chapter 5

Dialogue: Salute and Esther 3:1-6

As established in the earlier chapters, the purpose of the Salute is a military custom for which a soldier or participant of the Salute signals the acknowledgement and respect to a superior rank. At the highest levels, they are reciprocated and are indicative of a feeling of mutual trust and respect. Although the exact origin of the Salute is difficult to trace, the story in Mordecai portrays this understanding when dialogued with the perspective of the Salute.

There are many factors that contribute to a proper salute in the world that we live in today, and it is only when these are exercised in a correct manner, does it constitute to being called a proper salute. Correctly performing the hand salute involves the right hand, the wrist, the fingers slightly touching the lower part of the right eyebrow when executed. Therefore, the overall implication for a ‘proper’ salute, is to execute everything in its correct formation, for failing to do so is a failure to acknowledge the individual being saluted. This is clearly evident in the non-bowing act of Mordecai to Haman. Not only did Mordecai not properly bow down, or in light of this paper ‘salute’, there was no attempt to even consider the act itself. As clearly seen in the exegetical work, the act of no proper salute to Haman from Mordecai is a dispute that goes deep in the historical background of Haman and Mordecai.

The conflict and the dispute between Haman and Mordecai are I believe an issue of superiority, as well as self-political advancements. Haman as mentioned in the exegesis, seems to be rooted in believing he is the one who holds the power. In its narrative context, Mordecai’s refusal to kneel and bow down to Haman is also a political statement, as he is refusing to accept Haman’s authority. Moreover, the concept of acknowledgement

beckons to ask the question in this paper, as to who holds the authoritative power? Is it Haman? Is it Mordecai? Is it the king himself? If Haman had reacted to Mordecai's refusal to bow by complaining about it to the King, Mordecai could have responded that kneeling and bowing down is reserved only for the king himself, and such a point coming from someone who appealed to the king, may have diminished the authoritative status of Haman.

Furthermore, the dualistic powerplay in the narrative as extracted in the exegetical work plays a major role in the narrative. The conflict between the Amalekites and the Jewish people or the Israelites is one carried on in this dilemma between Mordecai and Haman. In light of this study, Haman is 'saluting' and representing his Amalekite people, while Mordecai himself is also 'saluting' his Jewish identity while maintaining his acknowledgement of his one true God.

Therefore, in a parallel comparison with the Salute perspective, the narrative of the text Esther 3:1-6 presents the importance placed upon the intentions of the one executing the salute, and the one being saluted to. Mordecai perceives that his acknowledgement of Haman, is of moral deprivation of his duty to God, and can almost be seen as a lack of reciprocity by Mordecai. However, I do argue that the fact Haman demands for people to bow down to him, is in itself a disrespect and a non-acknowledgement of not only other's beliefs, but also a symbolic attitude of not returning the reciprocity of acknowledgement. So, in the case of these two characters, their political stances seem to conflict one another's and the question remains, who then holds the truth from the Salute perspective.

The implications drawn out from the selected text clarifies the importance of not necessarily the meaning of showing respect, but rather a reciprocity of the concept of acknowledgement. The failure of Haman to acknowledge the duties done by Mordecai prior to our selected text and failure to acknowledge Mordecai's people, is indeed a sign

of disrespect according to Mordecai's perspective. In saying so, this leads to a chain of events ultimately leading to Mordecai ultimately paying homage and acknowledgement to his one true God.

The Salute perspective itself holds true to the reciprocity of acknowledgement, something that is crucial in understanding respect. It is a symbol of a complementary environment where whether you are lower in rank, higher in rank, you must acknowledge the other party's beliefs and their roles in whatever circumstances.

5.1. A Salute to God

With Mordecai's resistance to Haman and his instructions, the importance of his acknowledgement of his Jewish faith against all the opposing factors remains as a Salute by Mordecai to God. It is a metaphoric and physically symbolic act by Mordecai to not only oppose Haman, but to also maintain his faith in God. In saying this, as seen in the narrative, there were others who had given in and acknowledged Haman's authority. What then does this mean? Can saluting God also be saluting those in authority? As stated by Oden, Haman is a representative of those in this world who gain authority, and then go on to abuse this in the world that they live in. So, saluting is subject to an individual and their observation of the situation. One could say that Saluting to God is saluting in the essence that an individual understands the consequences and the outcome of what could, and what would happen when one salutes. Does it necessarily result in the reciprocal acknowledgement of the saluted? As seen in the story and exegeted, theologically in the outcome of the story, the actions of Mordecai or his act of 'saluting' and acknowledging God, was rewarded in the result of the narrative, with Haman being killed.

Conclusion

This thesis has helped me integrate the Salute perspective within the selected passage of Esther 3:1-6. Furthermore, the drawing out of implications of the Salute has helped clarify the ambiguities within the selected text. Its practical execution and its implications have assisted in trying to find meaning around the acts of respect and most importantly, how acknowledgement can be viewed. I hope this study has established another tangent to the narrative. Using narrative criticism, various implications have been exegetically extracted from the text. The movement and the characters narration provided a clear picture of the reasons as to why Mordecai resisted to bow down to Haman. Moreover, there is a clear conflict in the historical lineages of the two, a long line of conflict between the Amalekites and the Israelites or the Jewish people.

The undermining factor that I believe is important in the Salute perspective and the dialoguing with Esther 3:1-6 is the concept of the acknowledgement of those in superior ranking, as well as the reciprocity of it also. This does not necessarily mean a show of respect, but more so a show of acknowledgement. The fact that Mordecai failed to acknowledge Haman, was due to not only the conflict between the Amalekites and the Israelites, but also due to Haman's power-play as if he was the one in power. It seems from our exegesis that it was only the King that was worthy of being bowed down to in authoritative superiority, meaning Mordecai interpreted the actions of Haman as arrogance. Such are the people in the world that we live in today. When arrogance and the intolerance of an individual comes in to play, the sense of entitlement and desire to keep other's down and diminish them further infects one's mind. It is a philosophical downfall where there is no room for acknowledgement of others below them, but rather becomes a self-arrogant superior ideological mindset instilled. In the case of Haman, it is

proven in the rest of the narrative, where he attempts to kill all the Jewish people. We find ourselves in situations like Haman, and it is our duty to remain grounded in humility.

Furthermore, Mordecai reminds that acknowledgement itself is situational. To Salute God, is to acknowledge things one knows benefits their own beliefs and their own understandings. Bowing down or in the case of this paper, Saluting, to the things of this world whether it be human, an object, is not necessarily a sign of disrespect to God, as it is clear in the exegesis that Jews would also bow down to their Kings. The circumstance in Esther 3:1-6 showcases Mordecai acknowledging God. To conflict with requests is to case the rage of those higher up, extremely perilous in any sort of society. The vast majority will forfeit their standards in some situations implying a superior opportunity for benefiting in some way. This I believe is where the situational concept of acknowledgement is implied. There are times when benefitting requires a ‘forced’ acknowledgement of those in higher ranks, especially for those who are oppressed and marginalised in society. However, Mordecai’s actions indicate another dimension. He would not bow down because he was an individual who stayed true to his standards, unafraid of the aftereffect of standing firm, a character quality to be esteemed. Was Mordecai in this case, right? As seen in the remainder of the story, God’s hand ceaselessly assists Mordecai against Haman’s plot, and would appear to demonstrate that he was correct, resulting in God acknowledging Mordecai for his faith.

The Salute perspective and its integration reveals how acknowledgement is situational and circumstantial. In life, we are often met with oppressed moments where we are forced to make decisions that ultimately require us to question our standards and our moral beliefs. The research done conclusively resounds that in this case, one must weigh the outcome of their actions in light of the circumstance and situation at hand. Therefore, to ‘Salute’, is to acknowledge in the sense that the concept or person

acknowledged judging by one's interpretation, reciprocates it. Just as Mordecai acknowledge God, so did God acknowledge and complement his actions by rewarding not only Mordecai, but also the Jewish community.

For the CCCS (Congregational Christian Church of Samoa), we must acknowledge God in our thoughts, minds, bodies and souls in all aspects of the ministry. Whether it be the acknowledgement of given concepts, or whether it be the acknowledgement of superior in rank, our text reminds us today that the complementary factor, is key to a successful community and ministry.

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