

Esther 3:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And all the king's servants, that were in the king's gate, bowed, and reverenced Haman: for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not, nor did he reverence.

Analysis

And all the king's servants, that were in the king's gate, bowed, and reverenced Haman: for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not, nor did he reverence. The king commanded all officials to bow and reverence Haman, and everyone complied—except Mordecai. His refusal to bow (kara, קָרָא) or show reverence (shachah, שָׁחַח, the word also meaning "worship") was principled, not merely stubborn. The Hebrew shachah often describes religious worship, suggesting Mordecai viewed this homage as idolatrous or theologically compromising. Given Haman's Agagite/Amalekite descent, Mordecai's refusal likely stemmed from God's command to utterly destroy Amalek (Exodus 17:14-16; Deuteronomy 25:19). Bowing to Israel's ancient enemy would betray covenant loyalty. Mordecai's stand demonstrates that civil obedience has limits when commands violate God's law. His costly faithfulness precipitates the crisis but ultimately enables deliverance.

Historical Context

Persian court protocol required elaborate shows of respect to superiors, including prostration before high officials and the king. The Greek historian Herodotus describes Persian proskynesis (prostration) as standard practice. Mordecai's refusal would have been shockingly conspicuous and culturally offensive. His

Jewish identity (revealed in v. 4) apparently motivated his refusal—whether due to monotheistic objections to quasi-worship of humans or specific enmity toward Amalekites. This public defiance of royal command risked severe punishment but maintained covenant faithfulness. Reformed theology affirms that submission to earthly authorities has limits when commands contradict God's law (Acts 5:29).

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How do believers discern when civil obedience reaches its limits and godly resistance becomes necessary?
2. What does Mordecai's costly stand teach about prioritizing covenant faithfulness over personal safety or cultural conformity?

Interlinear Text

يְכַעַר	בְּשָׁעָר	פֶּתֶן	לְהַנִּזְקֵן	עֲבָדֵי	וְכָל	يְכַעַר	בְּשָׁעָר	פֶּתֶן	لְהַנִּזְקֵן	עֲבָדֵי	וְכָל
H3605	servants	And all the king's	H834	gate	And all the king's	H3766	bowed				
H5650		H4428		H8179		H4428					H3766
וְשִׁתְּפָהָה:	לְבָטֵח	כִּי	לְבָטֵח	וְשִׁתְּפָהָה:	לְבָטֵח	וְשִׁתְּפָהָה:	לְבָטֵח	וְשִׁתְּפָהָה:	לְבָטֵח	וְשִׁתְּפָהָה:	לְבָטֵח
and revered	Haman	H3588	H3651	had so commanded	H6680	H0	And all the king's				
H7812		H2001			H6680	H0	H4428				
וְשִׁתְּפָהָה:	לְבָטֵח	וְשִׁתְּפָהָה:	לְבָטֵח	וְשִׁתְּפָהָה:	לְבָטֵח	וְשִׁתְּפָהָה:	לְבָטֵח	וְשִׁתְּפָהָה:	לְבָטֵח	וְשִׁתְּפָהָה:	לְבָטֵח
concerning him	But Mordecai	H3808	H3808	bowed	H3808	and revered					
H4782			H3808	H3766	H3808	H7812					