

Good Monday morning, my dear family and friends. Here is our Monday morning Devotional. God bless you as you read and pray.

DO YOU HAVE ANY “AGAGITES” ... STILL IN YOUR LIFE?

A Devotional prepared by Dr. Robert L. Morris

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“After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him.” (Esther 3:1)

“Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite...” When reading through the amazing story of the Book of Esther, one notices immediately that Haman is a very real problem. However, when considering this Old Testament account, it is strange how this Biblical story affirms that certain practices and qualities in life have a tendency to travel through the generations ... as in the case of Haman, hundreds of years. I choose to call this a “pentacentennial hatred,” indicating a 500-year persisting problem. Some of our “old practices” seem to hang around and give us problems later in life. In the quiet of your heart, think seriously: “Are there attitude or practices from long ago in my past that are still plaguing me, and I really need to let them go and live a victorious life over them?” Perhaps this brief study in a part of the Book of Esther will be helpful in facing the question: “Are there still some ‘Agagites’ in my life?” Let’s let the story from the Book of Esther help us answer this question, and point us to the responsible response.

In the general text of the Book of Esther, we need to remember that a study of this Old Testament book is not complete without understanding the personality of the Prime Minister of the Persian Empire, Haman. There are two character qualities that stand out clearly:

- A. He was terribly egocentric, and
- B. He was frighteningly irrational.

In Haman there emerges a man one must consider to be a dangerous psychopath driven by the demands of an insatiable vanity expressed in inflicting injury on any who frustrated his demands. This ego-driven quality is seen most clearly and forcibly in his relationship with Mordecai the Jew. Although he has a kingdom bowing before him, acknowledging his high position in the Empire as second only to King Ahasuerus, that was not enough for Haman. Mordecai must bow too! And when Mordecai refused to bow before him, Haman crafted a plan that would result in Mordecai’s demise and in addition, the death of every Jew in the Persian Empire. The infamous Haman manipulated the king, who in his own moments of irresponsibility was duped into signing the decree written by this egomaniacal, Jew-hating scoundrel. But wait! Haman’s depraved heart and mind could not have foreseen that such a scheme would be his downfall. His hate-sponsored decree would touch the one person for whom King Ahasuerus has obviously developed a true measure of love, namely lovely Queen Esther, herself a Jewess ... but this fact unknown to Haman!

But what is behind Haman’s hatred of Mordecai? After all he has an empire bowing before him, acknowledging his position of power and authority. Why, on the basis of one Jew refusing to bow, did this sinister, ego-driven man craft a plan designed to rid the entire world of the Jews? The answer lies in the eternal record, the key to which is tucked neatly into the Book of Esther, noted in the key verse for this Devotional.

“After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him.” (Esther 3:1)

Many years before, Agag, Israel’s mortal enemy had been slain by the prophet of God, Samuel (actually cut in pieces with the sword). (1 Samuel 15:33) Haman is recognized in the Book of Esther as a descendant of Agag, king of the Amalekites. It is knowing something of that history that is vital to understanding Haman’s intense hatred for all Jews.

Israel had been delivered from the Egyptian bondage. Daily rations of manna from the desert floor sustained them. Finally, they came to a place called Rephidim, and being thirsty complained to Moses that there was no water there. God then provided water for the Israelites according to Moses’ faith and obedience to strike the rock on which he was standing. It was at Rephidim that Israel met with their first

attack since leaving Egypt. (See Exodus 17:8) It was during that battle that Moses held up his hands, and as long as his hands were held high Israel prevailed over the Amalekites. When he grew tired and lowered his hands the Amalekites prevailed. Therefore, he sat on a rock and Aaron and Hur held his hands high and the Israelite army under Joshua prevailed over the Amalekites.

God gave some serious instructions to Moses at that time.

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.’ And Moses built an altar and called its name, The-LORD-Is-My-Banner; for he said, ‘Because the LORD has sworn: the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.’” (Exodus 17:14-16)

In other words, God declared war on Amalek. When Moses brought Israel near to the place where they would cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land, God spoke to Moses again and reminded him of the earlier instructions and what they meant.

“Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were crossing out of Egypt, how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you were tired and weary; and he did not fear God. Therefore, it shall be, when the LORD your God has given you rest from your enemies all around, in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance, that you will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. You shall not forget!” (Deuteronomy 25:17-19)

It is interesting to note how God “punctuated” His instructions to Moses by adding the powerful statement: “You shall not forget!” Unfortunately, the leadership of Israel did not obey God totally. Many years later the problem emerged and once again God gave specific instructions to Israel. Saul was the king over Israel. Various battles had been fought and won. Samuel the prophet of God approached King Saul with God’s message:

“Samuel also said to Saul, ‘The LORD sent me to anoint you king over His people, over Israel. Now therefore, heed the voice of the words of the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.’” (1 Samuel 15:1-3)

Saul enlisted the help of the Kenites, and ambushed the Amalekites, but made one very serious tactical error. The Bible records: “And Saul attacked the Amalekites, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt. He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed.” (1 Samuel 15:7-9)

That would come back to haunt God’s people, Israel. God told the prophet Samuel that Saul had disobeyed the instructions regarding the Amalekites. (See 1 Samuel 15:10) Samuel joined in God’s grief and went to see Saul. As he arrived in Saul’s presence the king said:

“Blessed are you of the LORD! I have performed the commandment of the LORD.” (1 Samuel 15:13)

Samuel’s response is a gem of confrontive communication.

“What then is the bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?” (1 Samuel 15:14)

Saul attempted to shift the blame onto the soldiers. But Samuel would have none of it. Saul even attempted to rationalize his way out of his disobedience by saying that the best of the plunder had been taken in order to sacrifice to the LORD God of Israel. In other word, he tried to give his disobedience some religious respectability. The reply of God through Samuel is startling and sobering:

“Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king.” (1 Samuel 15:23)

Samuel took over the action, had Agag brought before him, and pronounced and carried out the sentence of execution. But the story does not end there. It is obvious from Scripture that Saul’s armies did not leave ONLY Agag alive of all the Amalekites. This disobedience rose to haunt Saul one more time, and as well brought great grief to King David. Israel engaged in fighting the Philistines again, and the battle went hard against Saul and his army. A carefully aimed arrow from an expert Philistine marksman was driven into

Saul, wounding him seriously. He begged his armor-bearer to kill him rather than suffer as a wounded man in the hands of the enemy. The armor-bearer refused and Saul fell on his own sword in an attempted suicide. The armor-bearer, believing that Saul had killed himself, in turn fell on his own sword and died. David, in the meantime was fighting the Amalekites, a campaign that would not have been in the history books of Israel had Saul been obedient in the original encounter with Amalek. After David defeated the Amalekite army he came to a place called Ziklag. On his third day there, a man came from Saul's camp and after being questioned by David reported that he had come upon the scene with Saul having fallen on his own sword, but was still alive. Saul asked the man his identity and having found out, pleaded for him to kill him. The man obliged Saul, killed him, and took his crown and armband and brought them to David. Later that evening after a period of heart-wrenching mourning, David asked the man: "Where are you from?" And he answered, "I am the son of an alien, an Amalekite." (2 Samuel 1:13)

David asked: "How was it you were not afraid to put forth your hand to destroy the LORD's anointed?" (2 Samuel 1:14)

At that point David had one of his own men execute the Amalekite.

King Saul died in 1011 B.C. and the events of the Book of Esther took place in approximately 486 B.C., which is 525 years later. Haman, the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite reached back into his sordid history and pulled out a burning hatred for all Jews. Because of the commitment of one God-honoring Jew, unwilling to compromise his personal convictions, Haman took the opportunity to lash out at all Jews, and planned his pogrom – his designed violent destructive attack on the Jews in the kingdom.

It was Haman's irrationality, emerging from his egocentric character, with the fires of hatred fanned by ancient memory, that would serve as his ruin. But here is a source of tremendous encouragement for God's people. Satan may have his millions in his servitude, but he cannot reconcile himself to the fact that committed Christians just will not bow before him. Therefore he uses his most dangerous techniques in his quest to destroy the people and work of God. Every Christian should take heart, knowing that Satan's end is doom. He knows it. Christians know it. God has spoken.

A Christian hymn I have used earlier, I believe merits repeating here at the close of this Devotional. In 1936 J. Edwin Orr wrote the lyrics that are sung to a Maori Melody. The heart of this song focuses on the cry of the soul to be cleansed from anything that is displeasing to God. Join in singing it.

CLEANSE ME

1. Search me, O God, and know my heart today.

Try me, O Savior; know my thoughts, I pray.

See if there be some wicked way in me;

Cleanse me from ev'ry sin, and set me free.

2. I praise Thee, Lord, for cleansing me from sin.

Fulfill Thy Word, and make me pure within.

Fill me with fire, where once I burned with shame.

Grant my desire to magnify Thy name.

3. Lord, take my life and make it wholly Thine;

Fill my poor heart with Thy great love divine.

Take all my will, my passion, self, and pride.

I now surrender; Lord, in me abide.

4. O Holy Ghost, revival comes from Thee.

Send a revival – start the work in me.

Thy Word declares Thou wilt supply our need.

For blessing now, O Lord, I humbly plead.