

Mordecai, a Better-Than Saul Esther

Saul and the Amalekites		Mordecai and Agag
¹ There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish ... ² And he had a son whose name was Saul ... the Lord had revealed to Samuel: ¹⁶“Tomorrow about this time I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince over my people Israel. He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines.” (1 Sam. 9:1a-2, 16)	<i>A Royal Savior</i>	⁵ Now there was a Jew in Susa the citadel whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminite, ⁶ who had been carried away from Jerusalem among the captives carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away. (2:5)
¹⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Write this as a memorial in a book ... that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven ... The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.” (Exod. 17:14-16) ¹⁷ Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you came out of Egypt, ¹⁸ how he attacked you on the way when you were faint and weary, and cut off your tail, those who were lagging behind you, and he did not fear God. ¹⁹ Therefore when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your enemies around you, in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget. (Deut. 25:17-19) ¹ And Samuel said to Saul ... ² “Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. ³ Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.’ ” ... ⁴ So Saul summoned the people ... ⁵ And Saul came to the city of Amalek ... ⁸ And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:1-8)	<i>An Agagite Enemy</i>	¹ After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the Agagite ... and advanced him and set his throne above all the officials who were with him ... ¹⁰ So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman the Agagite ... the enemy of the Jews. (3:1, 10) ³ Then Esther spoke again to the king. She fell at his feet and wept and pleaded with him to avert the evil plan of Haman the Agagite and the plot that he had devised against the Jews ... “let an order be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman the Agagite ... which he wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the provinces of the king.” (8:3, 5) For Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur (that is, cast lots), to crush and to destroy them. (9:24)

⁷ And Saul defeated the Amalekites from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt. ⁸ And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive and devoted to destruction all the people with the edge of the sword. ⁹ But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them ... (1 Sam. 15:7-9)	<i>The Enemy is Defeated</i>	And the king said, “Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?” ... ⁹ Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, “Moreover, the gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, is standing at Haman’s house, fifty cubits high.” And the king said, “Hang him on that.” ¹⁰ So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. (7:8-10)
¹⁶ Then Samuel said to Saul ... ¹⁹ “Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you pounce on the spoil [שָׁלַל]? ... ²⁰ And Saul said to Samuel ... “I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. ²¹ But the people took of the spoil [שָׁלַל], sheep and oxen ... to sacrifice to the Lord” (1 Sam. 15:19, 21)	<i>The People’s Response</i>	And an edict was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded concerning the Jews ... ¹¹ saying that the king allowed the Jews who were in every city to gather and defend their lives, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate any armed force of any people or province that might attack them ... and to plunder their goods [שָׁלַל] (8:9, 11) ⁵ The Jews struck all their enemies with the sword ... but they laid no hand on the plunder ... ¹⁵ The Jews who were in Susa ... they killed 300 men in Susa, but they laid no hands on the plunder ... ¹⁶ Now the rest of the Jews who were in the king’s provinces also gathered to defend their lives, and got relief from their enemies and killed 75,000 of those who hated them, but they laid no hands on the plunder. (9:10, 15, 16)
¹ Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years ... And David sought the face of the Lord. And the Lord said, “There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death.” ² So the king called the Gibeonites ... ³ And David said to the Gibeonites, “What shall I do for you? And how shall I make atonement, that you may bless the heritage of the Lord?” ... ⁵ They said to the king ... ⁶ “let seven of his sons be given to us, so that we may hang them before the Lord at Gibeah of Saul, the chosen of the Lord.” (2 Sam. 21:1-6)	<i>Guilty Sons Punished</i>	⁶ In Susa the citadel itself the Jews killed and destroyed 500 men, ⁷ and also killed Parshandatha and Dalphon and Aspatha ⁸ and Poratha and Adalia and Aridatha ⁹ and Parmashta and Arisai and Aridai and Vaizatha, ¹⁰ the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews ... ¹² And the king said to Queen Esther ... “Now what is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what further is your request? It shall be fulfilled.” ¹³ And Esther said, “If it please the king ... let the ten sons of Haman be hanged on the gallows.” (9:7-10, 12-14)

Thus, the book of Esther replays the ancient conflict of Israel and the Amalekites (Exod. 17:8-16; Deut. 25:17-19) and between Saul and Agag (1 Sam. 15), but this time the latter son of Kish (*Mordecai*) succeeds, where the former son of Kish (*Saul*) failed. And just as the “kingdom” [מלכות] was taken from Saul and given to a “neighbor” [רע] who was “better” [טוב] than him (1 Sam. 15:28), so Haman’s position was given to Mordecai (Esther 8:2) and the “kingdom” [מלכות] was taken from Queen Vashti and given to a “neighbor” [רע] who was “better” [טוב] than her (Esther 1:19).

Kingdom Taken from Saul and Given to David	Kingdom Taken from Vashti / Haman and Given to Esther / Mordecai
²⁶ And Samuel said to Saul ... “For you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel ... The Lord has torn the kingdom [מלכות] of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor [רע] of yours, who is better [טוב] than you.” (1 Sam. 15:26, 28)	“let a royal order go out ... that Vashti is never again to come before King Ahasuerus. And let the king give her royal position [מלכות] to another [רעות] who is better [טוב] than she.” (Esth. 1:19) ¹ On that day King Ahasuerus gave to Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came before the king ... ² And the king took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman. (Esth. 8:1-2)

This is how messianic prophecy works! It’s complicated, but it’s beautiful. Mordecai and Esther are thus placed in the messianic “David slot” giving the exilic readers of this book fresh hope – *your king is coming! He will “speak peace” to His people (Esther 10:2-3) and He will “speak peace” to the nations (Zech. 9:9-10)! The only two places in the Hebrew Bible where this expression, “speak peace” [דבר שלום], occur are Esther 10:3 and Zech. 9:10.*

Prophetic Hope		Mordecai, the Messianic Model
Gen. 3:15	I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring [זרע]; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.	“If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish [יהודי] people [זרע], you will not overcome him but will surely fall before him.” (6:13)
Gen. 49:8-10	⁹ Judah [יהודה] is a lion’s cub ... ¹⁰ The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet	
Num. 24:7, 9	⁷ Water shall flow from his buckets, and his seed [זרע] shall be in many waters; his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. ... He crouched, he lay down like a lion and like a lioness; who will rouse him?	For Mordecai the Jew [יהודי] ... sought the welfare of his people and spoke peace [דבר שלום] to all his people. (10:3)
Zech. 9:9-10	Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey ... he shall speak peace [דבר שלום] to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.	