



# Minutes With Messiah

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## *Jumping the Chain*

Early in military training they teach about the chain of command. One of the things emphasized is that the chain goes up as well as down. That is, just as the captain of this ship doesn't give orders directly to the lowest seaman recruit, neither does that seaman go waltzing into the captain's cabin when he has a problem. He has to take it up the chain of command. One of the biggest sins of military life is "jumping the chain." Few things cause more resentment than to be skipped over when you are next in the chain. Perhaps that is why I notice when others jump God's chain.

God does have a chain of command. When one person has a problem with another, the chain upward is spelled out in Matt 18:15-17. The

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### God has a chain of command.

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proper chain is "offender alone, offender with witnesses, the church." In each case, the offended confronts the offender.

Unfortunately, many people jump the chain. When they are offended, they go to the elders and ask them to deal with the offender. This has the advantage, to them, of anonymity. It also appears to be letting the elders do their work of leading the church. Regrettably, it is also wrong. Jesus said the first link in the chain is to talk privately with the offending person. It may be that will be sufficient to resolve the problem. If it does, then it is frankly not the business of the elders or anyone else to know about the problem. If that step does not work, then take witnesses, not necessarily the elders, to

establish that the offender will not listen.

One of the wrongs committed when jumping the chain is that we give information to those who have no need to know. Sometimes we rightly call it gossip, the truth of the matter notwithstanding. Few people can so separate themselves from the situation that they can have knowledge about a person and

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### The problem may be solved at the earliest link.

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not let that affect their relationships. The hint of impropriety is sometimes as bad, sometimes worse, than the actual situation itself. Perhaps that is one reason Jesus said the first step in the chain was to go to the individual in private. If resolution can be made in private, then no one else needs have their opinions colored unnecessarily.

Let us not put other Christians in the position where they should be disciplining us. If we feel a brother has wronged us, let us not offend because we have been offended. Let us not jump the chain.

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# *Purim: Haman*

How many Christian preachers have been assaulted with a chorus of “boo’s” during one of their sermons? How would they react to an audience full of noisemakers every time they read a certain word? That is exactly what will greet every Reader of the Megillah (the scroll of Esther) in every synagogue in the world on Purim this month. During this most joyous of the “rabbinic” holidays, every time the name of Haman is read, the congregation makes noise to try to drown out that name. It makes it a favorite service for the children, of course. But why is that name so odious to the Jews? What caused Haman to do something that would make people the world over try to make sure his name is never heard?

Anyone who has read or heard the story of Esther and Mordechai, her uncle, knows what Haman did. This “Hitler of Persia” attempted to

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wipe out the entire Jewish race, at least within Persia, which comprised over half the known world. He persuaded the king to write into law that genocide was an accepted, even an encouraged practice. Even Hitler never dared make it a law, even though it was accepted an accepted practice by his army. Yes, we know what Haman did. But the question was what caused him to go to such extremes? What prompted such an outburst of hatred and evil?

## **Hitler and Haman**

Actually, some people might say that Hitler was almost justified in his policy compared to Haman. I wouldn’t say that. Sin is sin and evil is evil. But

some religious philosophers propose a social ethics in which the end sometimes justifies the means. Under that foul doctrine, Hitler can be seen as acting for the good of his country, or at least his political party. In depression era Germany, most of the money was held in banks owned by the Jews. It could “reasonably” be argued that the depressed economy could have been helped if the Jewish bankers would put more money in circulation. Add to this that the Jews generally supported the conservative politicians. Further, the Jews have necessarily been a “different” people, open to emotional attacks. Hitler’s political economy, therefore, called for condemnation of, and eventually annihilation of, the Jews. As it turns out, he was not a good economist, but a great politician. At least he had a studied, political reason for his policy against not only Jews, but also Catholics, Masons, and others. Did Haman have such “elevated” (though still sinful) reasons for his genocidal policy? Hardly!

The reason for Haman’s hatred of the Jews, and only the Jews, can be found in two sentences in the Megillah. “And when Haman saw that Mordechai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath. And he thought it scornful to lay hands on Mordechai alone (for they had showed him Mordechai’s ancestry); therefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom.” (Esther 3:5-6) It is further showed a couple of chapters later.

Then went Haman forth that day joyful and with a glad heart: but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he stood not up, nor moved for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai. Nevertheless Haman refrained himself: and when he came home, he sent and called for his friends, and Zeresh his wife. And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. Haman said moreover, Yea,

Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and tomorrow am I invited unto her also with the king. **Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.** (Esther 5:9-13) (Emphasis mine.)

Haman launched a plan of destroying a whole nation because ONE MAN refused to bow to him. He had recently seen his king, at the advice of counselors such as himself, banish the queen for just such a crime. But even his king had only resorted to banishment of one woman when his pride was hurt. Haman's pride took him further. It extended to the whole people that gave birth to the one man who hurt his pride. If one Jew refused to bow down, then the nation that spawned him must have the same attitude, even though they chose to bow.

### **God's reaction to Pride**

God's name is not found in the whole book of Esther. But his hand and his principles certainly are. One of those principles, expounded in Proverbs, is that "pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." (Prov. 16:18) This was certainly true in the case of Haman. Simple pride puffed him up, but God brought him down. God is not mocked. He will not stand for anyone to put another god before him.

Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. (Exodus 20:3-6)

How much more so when we, ourselves, are that other god. For that is the sin of pride—elevating oneself to the status of a god. Wasn't that how the tempter approached Eve in the garden, saying "For God knows that in the day ye eat thereof, then your

eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:5)

Our God promised through the prophets that the prideful would be brought low. "Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith." (Hab. 2:4) While God was talking about a whole nation, the passage applies equally to an individual. The contrast is here made between pride and justice, between "not upright" and faith which brings life, between lifting oneself up and being upright. God doesn't want us to put ourselves on his level. He is mindful of man and "made him a little lower than the angels." (Ps 8:5) That is, lower and not higher than the angels. We

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should not, like Haman, try to put ourselves on a higher level. If we are to be exalted, let God do it. If we, on the other hand, put ourselves up, God will bring us down.

### **We are now available on the web.**

<http://members.aol.com/tjohearn>

This bulletin, as well as general information about the Riverside congregation of the church of Christ in Albuquerque, is now available on the world wide web at the URL above. All previous articles are available, and I will be adding each month's articles as I publish them in this format.

# *The Worry Stone*

I have in my pocket a “worry stone.” It’s a flat, black stone about 1” X 2”, the sort of stone that would make a good “skimming stone” if I had the inclination to throw it across still waters. I’ve had it for a number of years, probably since they were popular back in the early 70’s. The purpose of a worry stone is to work out your nervous tensions physically. If you are worried about something, you put your hand in your pocket and rub your thumb across the stone. Some people have worn a long groove in theirs, they use it so much. Mine looks pretty much the same as the day I found it. It’s not that I don’t have worries. I’m just not the type to use a worry stone—just keep it in my pocket “just in case.”

Some people carry God like a worry stone. He’s kept out of sight, and generally out of mind. When something comes along that is too big for their comfort, they reach in the pocket and rub God, like a genie’s lamp, and say, “take care of this worry for me.” Then they let him sink back to the bottom of the pocket until the next time they “need” Him. With some people, God has a groove that fits their thumb like a glove, they use him so often to take care of “the big stuff.” For others, he just sits in the pocket, waiting to be remembered.

God doesn’t want to be a worry stone. That’s

not to say he doesn’t want to take care of your worries. He actually begs for them. “Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.” (1 Pet 5:7) He wants your cares. Not just the “big ones,” but all your cares. Not just when you remember to use your worry stone, but all the time. You see, a worry stone doesn’t really do anything, or feel anything. It can’t really take away your worry. And it certainly doesn’t care if you have any cares, or not. God, on the other hand, can take away the worry and make it all better. More importantly, as Peter said, “he cares for you.” He is not an unfeeling stone to be left in your pocket, but a friend to go to when times are good or bad.

“The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; so I shall be saved from my enemies.” (Psa 18:2-3)

Tim O’Hearn