

Shiur #14: The Gallows  
By Dr. Jonathan Grossman

Following the first party that Esther holds in honor of the king and his closest advisor, the text recounts how Haman emerged "joyful and with a glad heart" (5:9). A situation of this type is usually labeled "dramatic irony," since the reader knows something that the character in question does not, and the discrepancy between the two perspectives gives rise to ridicule. In our context, Haman is delighted that the queen has seen fit to invite him, too, to the special party that she has held in honor of the king. Not for a moment does he imagine that Esther is plotting against him, nor does he understand that the king is also growing suspicious of him. In the hidden writing that typifies Esther, the creation of dramatic irony has special effect, insofar as these situations emphasize to the reader that the characters are acting without knowledge of what is really going on. This device itself serves to raise the issue of knowledge and concealment as one of the deeper concepts treated in the narrative.

The expression "joyful and with a glad heart" appears elsewhere in Tanakh (such as in the curses of the covenant forged on the plains of Moav: "... Since you did not serve the Lord your God in joy and with a glad heart" – Devarim 28:47). Nevertheless, this description of Haman refers the reader specifically to another narrative in which people emerged "joyful and with a glad heart" following a "party." It recalls King Shelomo and the nation, in Sefer Melakhim, following the building of the Temple and Shelomo's prayer: "And the king and all of Israel with him offered a sacrifice before God. And Shelomo offered the sacrifice of peace offering, which he offered to God: twenty-two thousand oxen, and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep. Thus the king and all of the children of Israel dedicated the House of God... and Shelomo held at feast at that time, and all of Israel with him – a great congregation from the entrance to Chamat up to the river of Egypt, before the Lord our God, for seven days and seven days – fourteen days. On the eighth day he sent the people away, and they blessed the king and went to their tents, joyful and glad of heart, for all the good that the Lord had performed for David, His servant, and for Israel, His nation" (I Melakhim 8:62-66). In both narratives people leave the house of the king (the King of kings or King Achashverosh) following a special celebration, "joyful and glad of heart." In the case of the dedication of the Temple, the people go "to their tents," while Haman "came to his house" (5:10). This parallel sits well with others that we have mentioned thus far, all serving to create a strong connection between the house of the king (Achashverosh) and the Temple in Jerusalem. Our instance is another hint at the chasm separating the Persian culture and environment from their Israelite counterparts. At the same time, by causing the reader to recall the joy of Shelomo and his subjects as he reads of the joyful Haman, the author also points to a specific difference between these two scenes. What is the reason for the joy and gladness of heart in each case? The Israelites, according to the text in Sefer Melakhim, are joyful over the completion of God's Temple; they are glad of heart over "all the good that the Lord had performed for David, His servant, and for Israel, His people." Haman is joyful and glad of heart because – as he himself tells his friends – "The king had promoted him and elevated him over all the ministers who were with him" (5:11). In other words, Haman – like the nation of Israel – is joyful and glad of heart because of the good and kindness bestowed on him by the king. The

difference is that the good performed by God will last a long time, while the good for which King Achashverosh is responsible may be overturned in a single night.[1]

It is Mordekhai's failure to prostrate himself that clouds Haman's mood: "But when Haman saw Mordekhai at the king's gate, neither standing nor stirring for him, then Haman was filled with wrath against Mordekhai" (5:9). Here the narrator adds: "But Haman restrained himself, and he came to his house..." (10). From the fact that Haman had to "restrain himself," we deduce that his anger almost overcame him; he almost struck out at Mordekhai on the spot, but succeeded in holding himself back.[2] Why did Haman have to restrain himself? Why did he not strike Mordekhai there and then? Did Haman – the second to the king – owe an accounting to anyone for his actions? It seems that Mordekhai's status "at the king's gate" prevented Haman from doing to him whatever he wanted[3]; apparently, it was only as part of an overall plan for the total annihilation of the Jewish nation that Haman would be able to harm him.

But this understanding raises a problem in comprehending Haman's actions that follow. In his extreme agitation, upon returning home he gathers his cronies to ask their advice: "Haman restrained himself, and he came to his house and sent and called for his friends and for Zeresh, his wife..." (10). First, Haman tells them of his great success: in terms of finance ("The glory of his riches"), family ("The multitude of his children"),[4] and his status in the kingdom ("Had elevated him above the ministers and the king's servants"). Haman awards special emphasis to his invitation to Esther's party: "Tomorrow, too, I am invited to her with the king" (12). This emphasis is achieved by means of the special introduction to these words as Haman's direct speech. First, the narrator tells the readers what Haman said: "Haman told them of his great riches..."; however, when it comes to Esther's invitation, the literary technique changes and we have a direct quote: "Haman said, Moreover, Queen Esther permitted no-one..." This, as noted, underlines the great significance that Haman awards to his invitation by Esther to the party that she has prepared, thereby highlighting the contrast between Esther's true intentions and Haman's expectations, creating a powerfully ironic reading: the very same fact that Haman regards as the pinnacle of his success is in fact nothing but the prelude to his dramatic fall.

Haman's success is "of no benefit to him" the moment he encounters Mordekhai "sitting" at the king's gate. The expression, "All this is of no benefit to me," recalls Haman's words to the king when he requested to destroy the Jews: "It is of no benefit to the king to tolerate them" (3:8). Thus, Haman himself – quite unknowingly – utters the bitter truth: it is not the Jews whom it is "of no benefit" to tolerate, but rather he himself who will be "killed, annihilated and destroyed." [5]

After the good friends of Haman and Zeresh hear his troubles, they offer the following suggestion: "Zeresh, his wife, and all his friends, said to him, Let a gallows, fifty cubits high, be prepared, and in the morning, tell the king that Mordekhai should be hanged on it. Then go joyfully with the king to the party"(5:14.)

Here the reader seeking drama and intrigue is sorely disappointed: Haman arrives home helpless and frustrated by Mordekhai's refusal to bow before him. To solve this painful problem he gathers "his friends and Zeresh, his wife," and finally the solution that Haman has sought is proposed. With bated breath the reader prepares himself for Zeresh's plan, which turns out to be – to kill Mordekhai! Was it really necessary for Haman (and the reader) to wait until he returned home and gathered all his advisors – only to arrive at such a

staggeringly simple solution?! Killing Mordekhai was the first idea that Haman entertained right at the beginning of the story, but at the time it seemed too insignificant a punishment: "He disdained to lay his hand on Mordekhai alone – for he had been told of Mordekhai's people" (3:6). As noted above, the insertion of the expression "Haman restrained himself" at the beginning of this scene hints to us that Haman considered this idea, but Mordekhai's position, "sitting at the king's gate," made it difficult to get rid of him.

What, then, is the innovation in Zeresh's suggestion? If there is no special difficulty involved in executing Mordekhai, why does Haman not think of it himself, without the generous assistance of his wife? Clearly, this is the simplest and most obvious solution to Mordekhai's provocation of him.

To understand what Zeresh has in mind we must try to understand, from her words, what special innovation she is proposing, beyond a simple, "Let's kill him." Two interesting points come to the fore:

- a. "Let a gallows be prepared, fifty cubits high... and let Mordekhai be hanged on it." In other words – executing Mordekhai by hanging.[6]
- b. "In the morning, tell the king." In other words, the hanging will not be carried out as a personal settling of accounts, but rather by royal decree.

In order to understand the significance of the idea of hanging, we must ask ourselves whether perhaps in Achashverosh's kingdom – and hence in the consciousness and speech of Zeresh and Haman – hanging represents a specific punishment, rather than just a general means of execution. If it has some specific significance, then by proposing that Mordekhai be hanged, and by emphasizing the height of the gallows, Zeresh is referring to some deeper idea that finds expression in this particular mode of execution. If the author believes that the reader understands the significance of this manner of execution, then he hints to it even before Zeresh suggests that Mordekhai be hanged: a hanging has already taken place in the narrative, following the plot by Bigtan and Teresh:

"During those days, while Mordekhai sat at the king's gate, Bigtan and Teresh – two of the king's chamberlains, of those who guarded the door, grew disaffected and sought to lay hands on King Achashverosh. And the thing became known to Mordekhai, and he told it to Queen Esther, and Esther told it to the king in Mordekhai's name. And the matter was investigated and it was found out, and both of them were hanged on a gallows, and it was recorded in the Book of Chronicles before the king" (2:21-23.)

In other words, in Esther, hanging on the gallows is a punishment meted out to traitors. Zeresh's idea, then, it to accuse Mordekhai of treason, or – in Shushan code – to "hang him on the gallows"![7]

This reading is further strengthened within the context of the larger literary unit, but to examine it properly we must first address the division of the narrative into units, which is a complex task. Owing to the surprising connection between one event and another, the narrative creates various links between the different literary units, which sometimes makes it difficult to define the beginning and end of a specific scene or stage of the plot.

The author of Esther helps us by providing two different introductions to the brief literary units that comprise the plot. This device is especially noticeable in the first half of the narrative, where two different introductions stand out clearly:

" (1:2)In those days, while King Achashverosh sat upon his royal throne"...  
 "(2:1)After these things, when King Achashverosh's anger was assuaged, he remembered Vashti"  
 "(2:21)In those days, while Mordekhai sat at the king's gate, Bigtan and Teresh"...  
 "(3:1)After these things, King Achashverosh promoted Haman son of Hamedata"...  
 "(6:1)On that night the king could not sleep"  
 "(8:1)On that day King Achashverosh gave the house of Haman to Queen Esther"

We may organize the narrative into literary divisions on the basis of these two types of introductions, and some interesting emphases emerge. The literary unit that we are currently discussing starts with the expression, "In those days, as Mordekhai sat at the king's gate" (2:21), and ends with the words, "On that night the king could not sleep" (6:1.)

This brief unit is structured in chiasmic form. Let us examine the images that comprise it:

- a. The hanging of the traitors:  
 "Esther told it to the king in Mordekhai's name. And the matter was investigated and it was found out, and the two of them were hanged on the gallows"
- b. Promotion of Haman:  
 "King Achashverosh promoted Haman... and elevated him and placed his seat above all the ministers who were with him. And all the king's servants ... would bow down and prostrate themselves to Haman"
- c. Haman's anger at Mordekhai:  
 "When Haman saw that Mordekhai was not bowing and prostrating himself to him, then Haman was filled with wrath"
- d. Haman's request of the king:  
 "Their laws are different from all people, and they do not keep the king's laws... if it please the king, let it be written that they be destroyed"...
- e. Writing of Haman's letters:  
 "And letters were sent out by couriers to all of the king's provinces... the copy of the writing to be given as law in each and every province"
- E1. Dispatch of Haman's letters (to the provinces and to Esther)  
 " The couriers went out in haste at the king's command  
 And in each and every province, wherever the king's word and his law came... and a copy of the writing of the law that had been given in Shushan, to annihilate the Jews, he gave him"
- D1. Esther's request of the king:  
 " I shall go in to the king, which is not in accordance with the law, and if I perish, then I perish...  
 And Esther said, If it please the king, let the king come"...
- C1. Haman's anger at Mordekhai:  
 " When Haman saw Mordekhai at the king's gate, neither arising nor stirring for him, Haman was filled with wrath at Mordekhai"
- B1. Promotion of Haman:  
 "And all that the king had promoted him, and that he had elevated him about the ministers and the king's servants"
- A1. Zeresh's suggestion – hanging Mordekhai on the gallows:  
 "Zeresh, his wife, said to him: Let a gallows be prepared, fifty cubits high, and in the morning, tell the king that Mordekhai should be hanged upon it".

\*The focus of the narrative is, obviously, the writing of the letters with their decree of annihilation, their dispatch and publicity throughout the provinces (e-E1). Part of the publicizing of the decree is the private notification that Mordekhai gives to Esther, and it is here that the fateful decision is made: "If I perish, then I perish." [8]

\*What leads to the writing of these letters is Haman's request of Achashverosh (d), and the beginning of the process that will lead to their nullification is Esther's approach to the king and her request of him (D1.)

\*The cause that gives rise to the letters is Mordekhai's failure to bow down to Haman, and Haman's consequent anger (c). We then discover that even after the letters have been sent out, Mordekhai still stubbornly refuses to bow before Haman (C1). [9]

\*Mordekhai's failure to bow down to Haman is perceived in Shushan as a grave offense, owing to the great honor that has been awarded to Haman (b) – an honor that is radically undermined by Mordekhai's refusal (B1.)

\*Finally, surprisingly enough, the framework of the whole story turns out to rest on the hanging on gallows (a-A1). Corresponding to the hanging of the traitors on the gallows, we read of Zeresh's suggestion that Mordekhai be executed in the same way. Apparently, as noted, what she has in mind is the same hanging – i.e., as a punishment for treason. This is the pretext that Haman can use to bring about Mordekhai's downfall. As proposed in our discussion of Haman's promotion (chapter 3), it seems that Haman was responsible for the king's personal security, and whatever he would declare in the name of his position would be acceptable to the king who reigned from India to Ethiopia. Even Mordekhai, sitting at the king's gate, is not immune to being suspected of treason.

Zeresh emphasizes, "In the morning, tell the king." Her idea is to turn Mordekhai into a traitor and thereby to have him executed officially, by the king's command.

But Zeresh and Haman are unaware of one small detail. There is, in fact, one person in the kingdom who does happen to be immune to any aspersion on his loyalty. That person is Mordekhai, who has already proved his great loyalty to the king by preventing Bigtan and Teresh from assassinating him! Obviously, it is no coincidence that on that very night the king is reminded of this episode, and that a moment before Haman enters with his request, the king is wondering how to reward Mordekhai, his loyal subject!

The contrast between the intentions of Zeresh and Haman, and what happens to Haman in reality, is reminiscent of the words of the psalmist: "He made a pit and dug it out; he has fallen into the ditch that he fashioned" (Tehillim 7:16). [10]

While Haman seeks to accuse Mordekhai of treason, the king is reminded that Mordekhai is a loyal subject who prevented the previous rebellion (first image of the gallows), while concerning Haman himself the king is starting to entertain some concern with regard to betrayal. This scenario is a very dangerous one, for if Haman – who is responsible for the king's security – decides to rebel and to take over the kingdom, there is no-one who can warn the king; Haman's all-encompassing authority will only help him in his efforts.

It is not surprising, then, that we once again encounter the gallows at Haman's end, after the king sees Haman lying on the bed upon which Esther rests and after hearing that Haman tricked him into planning the annihilation of an entire people behind his back. The king utters his verdict – "Hang him upon it"; i.e., he is sentenced as a traitor. What Haman sought to do to Mordekhai – accusing him of rebellion and treason (despite his innocence) is what happens

to Haman himself: he is hanged as a rebel and a traitor (although he, too, is not really guilty....

We find further evidence of hanging on the gallows as a punishment for rebellion in Persian law, in Ezra. There we read of the proclamation of Darius, giving the Jews license to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem:

"I have given an order that any person who violates this law – let a beam of timber be taken from his house and let him be hanged upon it, and let his house be laid waste" (Ezra 6:11.)

Darius emphasizes that it is he who has given the order that the Temple be rebuilt, and anyone who disturbs the building will therefore be violating an explicit decree of the king. His verdict – in keeping with the law of a traitor – will be hanging on the gallows.[11] Another interesting point arises from Darius's words. It seems that in Persian law there is special significance to a traitor being hanged on a gallows made of wood that is taken from his own house. In Esther, too, Haman is hanged on a wooden gallows at his own house, as Charvona states: "Here, too, is the gallows that Haman prepared... standing at Haman's house, fifty cubits high" (7:9).[12]

In our discussion about Haman's decrees, we noted that the author borrows expressions taken from the episode of Navot's vineyard. It appears that Zeresh's suggestion to Haman should also be read against the background of that narrative:

Achav (and Izevel:(

" -Achav came to his house sullen and angry  
-And he said to her:  
-For I spoke to Navot the Yizre'eli  
-And Izevel, his wife, said to him...  
-Arise, eat bread and let your heart be merry"

Haman (and Zeresh:(

" -Haman restrained himself and he came to his house (and later on: - "mourning and with his head covered"  
-And Haman told them...  
-When I see Mordekhai, the Jew  
-And Zeresh, his wife, said to him  
-And go with the king to the party, joyfully"

Both narratives depict the same scene: the husband (who holds a position of power in the kingdom), finding himself unable to realize his desire (Navot's vineyard or prostration of all subjects), comes home angry and frustrated. He tells his wife (Izevel or Zeresh) what has happened to him, and describes the anguish that has been caused to him by so-and-so's refusal. The wife proposes a solution – the killing (by stoning or by hanging) of the troublemaker. This proposal is meant to encourage the husband – as manifest in his joyful eating and drinking.

This link, too, would appear to support our hypothesis as to the hidden message in Zeresh's suggestion that Mordekhai be hanged. Her plan should be compared with that proposed by Izevel to take care of Navot. Izevel's plan is set out explicitly in the following verses (I

Melakhim 21:9-10): "She wrote in the letters, saying: Declare a fast and seat Navot at the head of the people. Set two base men before him to testify against him, saying: You have blasphemed God and the king – and then take him out and stone him, that he may die".

We recall that the purpose of this fictitious trial is to have Navot killed so that King Achav will be able to inherit his vineyard. But why should Achav receive Navot's vineyard, even after the latter is dead? Why does the vineyard not pass to his inheritors? The Talmud explains:

"Our Sages taught: Those put to death by the king – their property belongs to the king. Those put to death by the Beit Din – their property belongs to their inheritors. Rabbi Yehuda said: Even in the case of those put to death by the king, their property belongs to their inheritors. [The Sages] said to Rabbi Yehuda: Is it not written, 'Behold, he is in the vineyard of Navot, where he has gone down in order to take possession of it.'" [13]

According to this Tannaitic source, the property of "those put to death by the king" belongs to the king (although R. Yehuda disagrees). Rashi explains: "Those put to death by the king – [this refers to those] sentenced to death by the kings of Israel, such as traitors," and the Gemara proves this law from the case of Navot's vineyard. In other words, the accusation against Navot in his fake trial was that he was a traitor; indeed, Izevel emphasizes, "You have blasphemed God and the king." Likewise, in the execution of this insidious plan: "Two base men came and they sat facing him and the base men testified against Navot in the presence of the people, saying: Navot blasphemed God and the king. And they took him out of the city and stoned him with stones, and he died" (13). [14]

Owing to the specific charge that Izevel wants to apply to Navot – cursing the king – his vineyard will become the property of the Crown, in accordance with the law pertaining to a traitor. It should be emphasized that Izevel appears, outwardly, to be following accepted judicial procedure; she puts a man on trial and follows the rules of Israelite law, but in truth this trial is a sham; Navot is being slandered, and his execution is cold-blooded murder.

Zeresh's plan is very similar to the one cooked up by Izevel. Zeresh, too, suggests to her husband that Mordekhai be removed by "legal means," by accusing him of treason, such that his punishment – like any traitor – will be hanging. As noted, she emphasizes this point: "And in the morning, tell the king" – i.e., Mordekhai's execution is meant to be grounded in a legal verdict issued by the king, rather than being perceived as a personal settling of Haman's accounts with him.

What happens, though, is that while Haman comes to the king to tell him to hang Mordekhai as a traitor, the king has just been reminded of Mordekhai, his loyal subject, and how Esther told him of the plot by the traitors. It is not Mordekhai whom the king suspects, but rather Haman himself, and he is hanged upon the very gallows that he prepared for Mordekhai. The person who will eventually underline this exchange of roles is Charvona, one of the king's chamberlains. When mentioning the gallows prepared by Haman for Mordekhai, he says: "Here, too, is the gallows that Haman prepared for Mordekhai (who spoke well concerning the king), standing in Haman's house, fifty cubits high." (7:9)

By accepted Zeresh's advice to build a gallows for Mordekhai, Haman sealed his own fate. And, in fact, this is quite fair and just, since there is a law in the kingdom: "That each man

should rule in his house" (1:22), but Haman returned "to his house" - and sought his wife's advice.[15] Thus Haman himself broke the law, and is deserving of punishment...

Translated by Kaeren Fish

[1]Concerning the expression "joyful and glad of heart," Moore refers the reader to I Shemuel 25:36 – "Naval's heart was glad" (Moore, p. 59). I do not know why she chooses specifically the example of Naval, but the comparison is appropriate: Naval, too, is unaware of what the feminine character in the story is planning at the exact moment when he is so glad. This description is highly reminiscent of Haman's state and Esther's actions.

[2]The verb "hitapek" (to restrain oneself) appears to be connected to the Accadean verb epêku, meaning "to grow strong." In Tanakh, this verb is usually used in the sense of "holding oneself back from doing a certain thing" (BDB, p. 67; Y. Steinberg, *Milon ha-Tanakh*, revised and corrected edition, Tel Aviv 5721, p. 65.)

[3]Indeed, in this scene the text emphasizes Mordekhai's status: "But when Haman saw Mordekhai at the king's gate, neither arising nor stirring for him..." (5:9.)

[4]Attention should be paid to the fact that in Haman's mind, "the glory of his riches" precedes "his multitude of children." In this matter Haman recalls his king, who likewise holds a special feast in order to show off "the riches of his glorious kingdom" (1:4.)

[5]A similar expression is mentioned in Elihu's confession before Iyov: "Let him line up men and say, I have sinned, and I have perverted that which was straight, and it has not benefited me" (Iyov 33:27). What a distance separates the confession of Elihu to one who is saved from his punishment, from the confession of Haman a day before his own punishment... It should further be noted that Haman's description of Mordekhai is ambiguous: do the words, "sitting at the king's gate" refer to the very fact that Mordekhai is at the king's gate (in which case "sitting" hints at his position and status, as we read in chapter 2: "And Mordekhai sat at the king's gate" – verses 18, 21), or does it refer to Mordekhai's physical state of sitting, rather than bowing down and prostrating himself? Berlin suggests that this ambiguity is deliberate: "Haman cannot bring himself to describe his humiliation in the presence of Mordekhai in all its force, even to his closest friends; therefore he uses the ambiguous "sitting" (A. Berlin, *Esther, Mikra le-Yisrael, Jerusalem-Tel Aviv, 5761, p. 114*). As an alternative we may propose that the text seeks to hint that even if it was Mordekhai's failure to bow down that originally angered Haman, later on his mere presence at the king's gate suffices to arouse Haman's ire.

[6]The height of the gallows sounds very peculiar: "fifty cubits" is more than twenty meters – approximately the height of a seven-story building! Perhaps this strange number is likewise meant to recall the Sanctuary and the Temple, serving to make a mockery of Haman. The reader associates a "fifty cubits" measure with the Sanctuary: "For the breadth of the courtyard on the west side there shall be hangings of fifty cubits... and for the breadth of the courtyard on the east side eastwards, fifty cubits" (Shemot 27:12-13). This measurement is also associated with Shelomo's Temple: "He made a porch of pillars, fifty cubits long" (I Melakhim 7:6). In fact, this measurement is also associated with the Temple envisioned by Yechezkel (see Yechezkel 40). However, while in the Sanctuary or the Temple fifty cubits is a measure of length or breadth, for Haman it becomes a measure of height! In other words, in their great enthusiasm to hang Mordekhai, Haman and Zeresh "recall" that the Israelites use a special measurement – 50 cubits – but they get its direction mixed up...

[7]Malbim paves the way for this interpretation. In commenting on 5:14, he writes: "They advise him cunningly as to a way of avenging himself on Mordekhai while not being seen to diminish his own honor. For if he would hang Mordekhai merely for the crime of not having



prostrated himself to him, this would diminish from his own honor, demonstrating that he had a feud with a Jewish man because the latter did not show the proper respect towards him. But sometimes the king would order that one of those who rebelled against him be hanged, so as to cast fear upon the people, so as to say: Anyone who acts in such a way will be subject to a verdict of hanging”.

[8]This dialogue conducted between Mordekhai and Esther is at the center of the limited structure that we are currently examining, but it is also central to the development of the plot as a whole. As noted in previous shiurim, at this point the reader enters a island with scenery that is different from that characterizing the rest of the narrative; suddenly we hear statements about God's Providence and about destiny ("Who knows if it was for a time such as this that you attained royal status"); we hear of self-sacrifice of the individual on behalf of the nation ("If I perish, then I perish"), and in the midst of all the partying, we read of a fast.

[9]As noted in our discussion about Mordekhai's refusal to bow down, it should be kept in mind that Esther is sent to the king at risk to her life, the Jews scattered throughout the kingdom have been ordered to fast, but Mordekhai is not prepared to take what would appear to be the simplest and most obvious step of asking forgiveness from Haman and starting to bow before him. See further on this matter in: Rav Y. Medan, "Mordekhai did not bow, not did he prostrate himself – Why?" in *Hadassa Hi Esther*, Alon Shevut 5757, pp. 151-170.

[10]Indeed, the Midrash weaves this verse into Mordekhai's prayer: "Mordekhai prayed to God, saying: It is clear and known before Your Throne of Glory, Master of the universe, that it was not out of pride or arrogance that I acted, in not prostrating myself to Haman, but rather out of fear of You that I acted thus, and did not prostrate myself to him, out of my awe for You, lest I show the honor due to You to a mortal, and I did not wish to prostrate myself to anyone but You. For who am I, that I should bow before Haman for the sake of delivering Your nation, Israel? For I would be licking the shoe of his foot, and now, our God, save us, I pray You, from his hand, and let him fall into the ditch that he has made, and be caught up in the net that he has spread for the feet of your righteous ones, and let this troublesome one know that You have not forgotten the promise that You made to us: 'Nevertheless, when they are in the land of their enemies, I shall not detest them, nor revile them, to destroy them, violating My covenant with them, for I am the Lord their God.'" (Esther Rabba, parasha 8,7.)

[11]See further: J. Blenkinsopp, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, Old Testament Library, London 1988, pp. 127-128

[12]It is possible that the verdict meted out to the royal baker, in Bereishit 40:22, should be interpreted in the same way. It should be noted that in Hebrew law, hanging is a punishment for brazen rebellion against God. Chazal limit this punishment to two specific sins: a blasphemer, and an idolater. (This is the majority view among the Sages; R. Yehuda disagrees, maintaining, "Anyone who should be stoned, may also be hanged." See: Sifri Devarim, Ki Tezte, 121, Finkelstein edition pp. 253-254, and Sanhedrin 45b.) Both blaspheming and idolatry represent a fundamental rebellion against God, and it is specifically these sins that are punishable by hanging. An echo of this view of hanging as a punishment for betrayal and rebellion is to be found in Megillat ha-Mikdash: "If there be a man who goes tale-bearing among his people or informs on his people to a foreign people, or causes harm to his people, then he shall be hanged upon the gallows, that he may die... If a person bears a sin that is punishable by death, and he flees into the midst of the nations, and he curses his nation, Bnei Yisrael, then he, too, is hanged upon the gallows, that he may die" (p. 64, lines 6-11; Yadin edition, Jerusalem 5737, part II, pp. 202-204.) Prof. Weinfeld correctly points out, "This represents political treason: 1. Handing over partners in covenant to the nations and "harming his people" mean, as in Akkadian, treason against the ruler. 2. Fleeing to a foreign nation and despising and alienating oneself from his own nation" (M. Weinfeld,

Devarim, Olam ha-Tanakh, Tel Aviv 1994, pp. 154-166). Y. Yadin writes a similar idea in Megillat ha-Mikdash, part I, Jerusalem 5737, pp. 285-286.

[13]Sanhedrin 48b. See also: Tosefta Sanhedrin chapter 4, Zuckerman edition, p. 421.

[14]See: E. Samet, Iyunim be-Parshat Navot, Megadim 10 (Shevat 5750), pp. 55-92.

[15]Cf. Fox, p. 74