

Dear Reader,

March 23-25, 2016

*I'm curious*, how did you come across this letter? Two days from now I'll put it in a bottle and cast it into a worldwide virtual ocean; and then I'll return to the place where I live and work. I don't live by the sea. I labor as a plowman—a tiller of the earth—it's all I know. Is there any hope for this son of Cain—if I dare do anything other than till the ground—from which Abel's blood cries out?

If you know your Bible perhaps you know of what I speak. If what I say causes you to find a Bible and open it, then I will have said enough. But if you go off looking for a sign or an omen or an interpretation of the future—then my words will have had the effect of Cain upon you. Caveat emptor. Or as the scripture puts it: :Why is there a price in the hand of a fool to buy wisdom, when he has no sense?:

*At sundown* tonight the Jews will recall a story in the Bible about a queen in ancient Persia whose name was Esther. She was Jewish—but for the longest time no one knew it except for her older cousin on her father's side, by the name of Mordecai, who became a father to her when her parents died. It's quite a tale of intrigue—touching upon two great themes: authority as identity; and power as relationship. And the most intriguing thing of all is that God Himself isn't mentioned anywhere in the story—not even once. What is intrigue? And why does it exist? Is intrigue good? Or bad? Or necessary? Or unfortunate? Or is intrigue good? And bad? And necessary? And unfortunate? Or what, then, is it? Or how is it? Or why?

Where there's smoke, there's fire; and where there's intrigue, there is authority. Fire is an agency of authority; and smoke is an agency of intrigue. The scroll of Esther draws upon an assortment of the many agencies of authority and intrigue to tell its story. Some of the agencies are secret, and some are readily apparent; some are public, and some are private; some are tangible and particular, and some are ideal and universal.

*Esther* was a secret agent whose real name was Hadassah. She didn't set out to engage in intrigue and she didn't aspire to authority; but eventually both became a part of her world, and both became a part of who she was. She was a stunningly beautiful girl when her father and her mother died. She happened to live in a society that had a well established regard for that agency of authority known as the rule of law—but not so much for a mere human agent with a foreign-sounding name—especially when that name was attached to a beautiful virgin who had no agency of father or mother to authorize that society's engagements and interactions with her. Were it not for the authority of the rule of law, the intrigue of Hadassah as an "Esther" and Mordecai as a "father" would have empowered them little, if at

all. Authority commands power; but apart from authority, the only rule by which to live and die is "might makes right". If Persia did not recognize and respect its own rule of law, then all that would really matter in the story of Esther was the need for Mordecai's personal strength to be at least the equal of Hadassah's personal beauty.

*Pretenders and usurpers of authority confuse the strong drink of their own might with the elixir of true power. With every exercise of their authoritarian arrogance and excess—no matter how Machiavellian—they venture further and further from their own throne of authority. Emboldened by their liquid courage—mixing with the intrigue of their own courts—they forget themselves. At some point such a king will forget to speak in terms of the royal "we". Eventually he will brazenly expose himself—as if to urinate on the floor of his outer courts—as a show of his contempt for his inferiors. In his end he proves himself to be a mere man—who wears a crown no better than he would a noose.*

*There are rules and rituals and formalities to be respected and observed in the exercise of true authority. And there are roles to be played, and banquets to be served, and pageantries to be displayed, within the intrigues of true power. Some are written and some are forever unwritten. A proverb serves a purpose; yet it can't make a man wise any more than a glass of expensive wine can make a man witty. But if an intelligent man is well versed in pithy proverbs and fine wines, he tends to make an exception for himself. Yet even such nobles and courtiers have roles to play in the courts of intrigue—even if they have no true understanding of who is really who—and why.*

*The book of Esther begins with the trappings of immense authority in the reign of one King Xerxes. The city of Susa—capital of the empire of Persia and Media—was coming to the glorious end of a three-years-in-planning, post-inaugural, "State of the Empire" retrospective—a tribute to the great and vast power of the king's throne under the rule of royal Persian law. But on the last day of the final, seven day banquet—when the king was full of himself—and perhaps had nothing or no one left of sufficient stature to toast in his closing remarks—he deigned to summon his queen, Vashti (to have her step away, necessarily, from the waning moments of a parallel banquet which she was hosting for "the significant others" of the king's banqueters), in order to glory in his crown of her beauty. But she refused to go with the king's eunuchs—as if she were one of his virgins or concubines. Perhaps her women of stature had been toasting themselves a bit too much. Or perhaps she was of a mind that her matter of state was no less important, in its own way, than his. Or perhaps she had the mistaken notion that she was the Queen in Susa, and not just the queen in the palace which belonged to King Xerxes. Or did she*

think that the crown which she wore belonged first, to her; and second, to the king; and third, to the rule of royal Persian law?

When a king offers “up to half his kingdom” to a queen with whom he is well pleased, she should know what’s at stake in her response: her life, first of all; and her dignity, second of all; and her authority, last of all—to ask whatever she will. But under the rule of Persian law, not even the king could undo his pants and give them to his queen to wear—even if he wanted to. Because not even the king himself wore the proverbial pants in his empire—the rule of Persian law did. And if the dictates of the palace intrigue of the Medo-Persian Empire required the palace queen to be displayed on certain rare occasions like either a virgin or a concubine, who did Queen Vashti think she was to show contempt for the beauty of it all? She did well to escape the intrigues of capital punishment. But in her case, there was no longer a queen in the king’s palace.

Well don’t you know, it just so happened that Esther, of all people, ended up winning the grandest rule of law beauty contest you could ever imagine. And you can be sure that Esther also won the nearly universal and unanimous approval and admiration of women of stature and their husbands throughout the kingdom. All was well and as it should be once again. And the power and authority of the throne of Susa continued to increase—and the intrigue also.

Now because of the rule of law, Mordecai was empowered to live in Susa, and he had a seat (albeit just one seat among many) at the king’s gate. He was a gate-keeper of sorts. And as such, he got wind of a highly-placed plot upon the king’s authority that reached right to his very door. But before the king’s door-keepers could execute their scheme, Mordecai—through the secret agency of his access to the queen—was able to by-pass all the fail-safes to exposure that the plotters had crafted throughout the workings of the king’s authority. And the intrigue was investigated and uncovered and the perpetrators were hanged; and Mordecai made no effort to trade upon his critical role in the defense of the king.

*If you* don’t know how the story ends you really must open up a Bible—or get to know a Jew. But this is precisely as far as I need to recount it for the purposes of this letter to you. Because this brings us to today, the 25th of March, 2016—which marks the festival of Shushan Purim on the Jewish calendar—the day on which Purim (the denouement of the story of Esther) is celebrated in the city of Jerusalem (and other walled cities). It’s the “Purim” after Purim—when the other shoe drops.

*One role* of the die may be a thing of chance; but two roles of the dice is a thing of probability. A casino is an agency of probability; and dice are an agency of chance. The elite movers and shakers of the world build walled cities where the odds are always in their favor. They believe in probability. They leave nothing to chance.

To say that they are “calculating” is a laughable understatement. Gangsters and accountants and high-rollers and low-ballers come and go—but the House always wins in the end. What? They didn’t tell you this when you were young? Before you decided if you wanted to be a fireman—or a smoker? Of course they did—this stuff is an open secret. Maybe you weren’t listening? Or maybe you listened too much. Why does the House always win? Losers say the game is rigged; but players love to take their chances. And just enough people with mouths and money will tell you that they really just go for the buffet. Oh—and they also only tell you how much money they won. Once. Or twice. While they were there. Before they left. To get some more money. Somewhere.

How about those buffets though? I’ve heard a lot about them. I saw one once. Looked awful impressive. Which reminds me. Speaking of food, the popular societal institutions of our day understand “food” mostly to mean something that has been prepared for our consumption and that can be eaten hand-to-mouth. At its more pedestrian level, this might mean a bag of chips while we watch TV. And at its more exclusive destinations, it might mean a seven-course meal, while our betters take the measure of the room.

*Knowledge is* like food—and like food, it’s not always easy to find or to eat, if you leave the big city and go out to the wilderness. That’s why people build cities—so someone else can process the food for us—so we can spend our time in more productive pursuits. Wisdom has a way of making knowledge more palatable to us as well. The highest scholars and philosophers and scientists of the great cities of the world have acquired the most refined and exquisite tastes, in terms of fine dining. And to the extent that they are humble and transparent, their palates have acquired great wisdom as well, in their understanding of the food that they eat. If there is a bona fide secret to the inner-circles of elite circles—it is this: these men and women in large part are truly humble (the exact opposite of what they would have you believe, down at the conspiracy pub, where you figure all these things out while you drink after work). And it’s not because it’s a virtue (true humility is not a virtue or a vice): it’s because it is an indispensable necessity in the rooms where they meet. The crème de la crème, however, are not content to spend a lifetime refining their understanding of the food that they eat. They tend to worry about the potential existence of certain sources and kinds of food, outside the city walls—which they have never tasted. They do what they can to ameliorate the dangers: they have people who go outside the city looking for just such things; and they have people inside the city who try to process such things as may be found; and they have people who taste things for them first, before they take it into their mouths. They even make an effort to personally go out into the wilderness—to hunt and to fish and to gather wild berries—albeit it’s all more sporting and clubby than real. But at least they know enough to try—and for what it’s worth, someday it just might afford them an after taste of the real thing.

*It's been* my intention with this letter, to serve you a proper meal, in an amenable way and at an acceptable time. I hope you've enjoyed it so far. But at this point, I have to tell you about some essays that I have written that aren't meant for your consumption—but in the spirit of full disclosure, I'm obligated to apprise you of their existence. These essays aren't found in the city. They are not eateries with a sign hanging outside—and they serve no patrons food or drink—and they utilize no processors of food in their environs. There are some sources of food there—and even some outcroppings of gems and minerals. But most of them are, on the whole, hostile environments of difficult to explore verbiage. I'm telling you this now so that if you happen to pick up one of these essays, you won't try to get your teeth around something in them that isn't meant to be eaten by anyone at all—let alone by you. It's a bit of a paradox, dear reader: those essays have been written for your sake—but not necessarily for your consumption. Particularly (as I said earlier) if they should take you away from your Bible. You would do better, in that case, to use those pages to line the bottom of your gilded bird cage, than to try to eat them.

*But the* final essay of the lot, that was written four years ago, over Purim, is the herald of today—and so I draw your attention to it by merit of this letter of introduction. It's entitled, "A Purim Green Paper". A green paper is a bureaucratic device of governance that presents a certain subject for the formative consideration of any and all of the requisite authorities that might play a role in the formulation of an official policy paper—which is more commonly known as a "white paper." As the essay states, it is "a limited critique of some of the players who are engaged in the current intrigue and conflict in the Middle East."

Before I chose to publish it to the internet, in an abundance of caution, I privately queried a brilliant and widely esteemed writer, to ask if he would be willing to read it and give me his opinion. Much to my surprise he agreed to do so, and so I sent it to him. In his response, he said it was brilliant, though he didn't agree with everything in it. This man is an individual of considerable character; and if the essay should at some point in the future require an unimpeachable attestation of authenticity—even from the perspective of a mildly "hostile witness", in a "loyal opposition", sort of way—I have no doubt that he will chance upon his recollection in the middle of some sleepless night.

Other than him back then, and now, you, I've told no one about the essay—because everyone who needs to know about the essay will know about it when they need to: including Amalek.

Best Regards,

Plowman