



# CONFLICT RESOLUTION

*"First seek the counsel of the Lord."*  
(1 Kings 22:5 NIV)

## Conflict Resolution Solving Your People Problems

*by June Hunt*

Living in obscurity as a Jewish orphan, she seemed the least likely candidate to be the mediator—the *only* mediator—to possibly save her people from sure destruction. However, the Lord knew her heart ... and He knew she would face the most severe conflict of her life with complete humility.

The entire conflict arose because of conniving Haman, a royal official in the king's court, who devised a plot to murder every Jewish person in the empire. His fury had been flamed by a man who refused to bow down to him—namely, Esther's *cousin Mordecai*, who had raised her. Little did Esther know that she would carry the fate of the Jewish people on her shoulders as she faced a conflict of epic proportions. Yet Mordecai aptly posed ...

*“Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”*  
(Esther 4:14 ESV)

## I. DEFINITIONS

Just how does Esther, this unknown young woman, become queen? After days of feasting, King Ahasuerus (King Xerxes) is *“merry with wine”* and wants to show off the beauty of his wife before the people and nobles. He summons seven attendants to send for her.... However, Queen Vashti refuses to come. The king becomes enraged.

At the advice of his closest counselors, the king issues a royal decree: Queen Vashti can never again enter into the king's presence, and she will be replaced! (Esther 1:19). With this new edict, the outward conflict between the king and queen appears to be “resolved.” But the resolution of one conflict sometimes gives rise to another—now the king *has no queen*. And because of the queen's haughtiness, the king's advisors felt they had to take action or else throughout the land ...

*“There will be no end of disrespect and discord.”*  
(Esther 1:18)

### A. What Is a Conflict?

In order to avoid discord and conflict among the people, a major search ensues. All the beautiful young virgins in the land are rounded up so that *“the girl who pleases the king”* would be selected as queen (Esther 2:4). Esther, described as a young woman who *“was lovely to look at,”* quickly gains favor. At Cousin Mordecai's instruction, she does not reveal her heritage. After a full year, Esther is finally taken to the king and he, *“loved Esther more than all the women ... and made her queen instead of Vashti”* (Esther 2:17). The plan for alleviating the loneliness of the king puts Esther on the path of God's divine purpose—but also on a collision course with a conflict of colossal proportions.

- **Conflicts** are disagreements, struggles, or battles over opposing issues or principles.
- **Conflictus**, the Latin word, means an “act of striking together or clashing with.”
- **Conflict**, in Greek, is often the word *agon*, from which the English word “agony” is derived. Originally meaning a “place of conflict,” this word came to mean the actual conflict itself and later any kind of *conflict*, struggle, or strife. The apostle Paul said, *“I want you to know how much I am*

*struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally” (Colossians 2:1).*

Now a personal power struggle begins when corrupt Haman, the top royal official, becomes infuriated with Mordecai, who day after day refuses to bow down to him. Meanwhile, wise Mordecai uncovers a plot that ultimately saves the king’s life. Haman is so outraged that, when he discovers Mordecai is a Jew, he manipulates getting a royal decree from the king mandating the massacre of all the Jews—every man, woman, and child. Haman has won the conflict. He will get his homage ... but at a very high—and *horrific cost*.

*“When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. Yet having learned who Mordecai’s people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai’s people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.”  
(Esther 3:5–6)*

## **B. What Is the Difference between Resolution and Reconciliation?**

At this point, no positive resolution is possible. The king’s decree has sounded. However, Mordecai appeals to Esther for help. She can’t believe what Mordecai is asking her to do. He knows the law: *“Any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that he be put to death”* (Esther 4:11).

Since she has not been summoned by the king for 30 days, how can she go to the king to plead on behalf of her people? What if the king becomes displeased with her? She needs to be reconciled to the king. Clearly, going to the king will mean putting her life on the line. To which Mordecai responds that *her life is on the line either way!*

*“Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape.... And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?”  
(Esther 4:13–14)*

### **Resolution versus Reconciliation**

Resolution and reconciliation are different.

- **Resolution** means “finding the answer,” derived from the Latin *resolutionem*, “the process of reducing things into simpler form” or “to lessen.”
- **Reconciliation** means “100 % restoration to harmony”; “to bring together again.”

Some differences may never be resolved, but you can still be reconciled to those with whom you differ. At other times, resolution may be possible, but reconciliation inappropriate—such as in the case of adultery or cult entrapment—God requires only that, as far as it is possible, you seek to be at peace with everyone.

*“Aim for perfection ... be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.”  
(2 Corinthians 13:11)*

## Question: “Is forgiveness the same as reconciliation?”

**Answer:** No. Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. Forgiveness focuses on the offense, whereas reconciliation focuses on the relationship. Forgiveness requires no relationship, while reconciliation requires nurturing a relationship—a time of coming together in which two people, in agreement, are walking together toward the same goal. The Bible says,

*“Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?” (Amos 3:3)*

## C. What Are Types of Conflict?

All of a sudden, Esther is facing an *inner conflict* just as heavy, just as grave, just as deadly as the *outer conflict* caused by Haman.

On multiple levels, Esther is a conflicted soul. Where will she find the strength, the courage, to do what needs to be done, what *must* be done?

### #1 *Intrapersonal* conflict

- A struggle **within oneself** to decide between two or more choices.
- In the Book of Esther, does Esther approach the king in an attempt to save the Jewish people from extinction—which could earn her a death sentence—or does she remain silent and live? Esther said,

*“All the king’s officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that he be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold scepter to him and spare his life. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king.” (Esther 4:11)*

### #2 *Interpersonal* conflict

- A clash of ideas or interests **between two or more people**.
- In the Book of Esther, malicious Haman plots to have Mordecai murdered only because Mordecai refuses to bow down to him.

*“When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged.” (Esther 3:5)*

### #3 *Intraorganizational* conflict

- A competitive or opposing action **within a group** (a family, department, church, political party, state, or nation).
- In the Book of Esther, the king learns about the plot which was crafted—not by the enemy on the outside—but by Haman, his top official on the inside. The king becomes enraged after realizing Haman has manipulated him into issuing a death sentence to murder all the Jewish people.

*“The king got up in a rage, left his wine and went out into the palace garden.... So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king’s fury subsided.” (Esther 7:7, 10)*

#### #4 **Interorganizational conflict**

- A battle or opposing action between two or more groups (families, companies, religions, or countries).
- In the Book of Esther, because of Haman’s surreptitious plot, the Persian nation threatens to annihilate the entire Jewish population—men, women, and children.

*“Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king’s provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews—young and old, women and little children—on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods.” (Esther 3:13)*

Conflict abounds ... in the Book of Esther, just as conflict fills the pages of our lives. The “should I” or “shouldn’t I’s,” disharmony in the home, wars in the workplace ... all try us and ought to lead us to the One to whom Esther will turn for the strength, courage, and resolution she needs. His name isn’t even mentioned in the entire Book of Esther, but His sovereignty spreads itself like a shadow over every chapter.

### **D. What Is God’s Heart on Conflict Resolution?**

Drastic times call for drastic measures.

Esther asks Mordecai to gather all the Jews in Susa, one of the empire’s main capitals, and have them all fast for her. Three entire days of no food and no drink, and she and her maids will do the same. Esther enlists the people of God to pray for rescue, *for resolution of the most formidable challenge of her life.*

*“Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”*  
*(Esther 4:16)*

Her act of faith worked to open his heart. When she approaches the king without having been summoned, he extends to her the golden scepter of grace. Now she is allowed to make her request. When Esther invites the king and Haman to a banquet that day, the king seems eager to fulfill her wishes.

After the king and Haman attend the feast, Esther invites them to a second feast the next day. On this day she will plead the case on behalf of her people.

In the middle of the feasts, Haman is crafting gallows 50 cubits high (75 feet) on which to have Mordecai hanged! But while Haman is building, the king orders that the book of memorable deeds during his reign be read to him. *Found within its pages* is the account of *Mordecai’s having saved the king’s life.* The following morning as Haman arrives at the palace to talk about hanging Mordecai, the king asks him, *“What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?”* (Esther 6:6).

Confident the king must be referring to him, Haman proposes placing royal robes and a crown on the man and having a noble official lead him on one of the king’s horses through the city square, proclaiming, *“This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!”* (Esther 6:9).

While Haman is indeed part of the king's plan, his role is *beside* the horse, not *on* it! Humiliated, Haman leads Mordecai, mounted on a steed, through the city streets—for all to see. Then, entirely mortified, Haman returns home after the public spectacle. There he receives from his wife and friends a message not of hope, but of doom: *"Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him—you will surely come to ruin!"* (Esther 6:13).

- *Conflicts* can be used to accomplish God's purpose. (Only after becoming queen was Esther able to save the Jewish nation.)

*"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."* (Romans 8:28)

- *Conflicts* cannot always be avoided. (Esther and the Jewish people could not escape Haman's threats.)

*"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* (John 16:33)

- *Conflicts* are not necessarily bad. Handled well, they provide an opportunity for role modeling. (For centuries, Esther has been and continues to be a role model of how to make an appeal to a higher authority.)

*"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."* (Proverbs 27:17)

- *Conflicts* require action toward peace. (Esther had to take action in order to save her people.)

*"Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification."* (Romans 14:19)

- *Conflicts* require advance preparation and planning. (Esther meticulously planned two royal dinners, the timing of her petition, and her very words.)

*"Prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed."* (1 Peter 1:13)

- *Conflicts* can be settled through negotiation. (Esther graciously negotiated with the king.)

*"Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise."* (Proverbs 19:20)

## **E. Who Creates Conflict and Who Keeps It Going?**

The next day, during the second feast, at the king's urging, Queen Esther finally makes her request that her people be spared from annihilation by the crafty snake, Haman (Esther 7:3–6). Not only does the king grant her request, but in his rage he has Haman hanged on the very gallows he had built for Mordecai.

After a time of great conflict, true resolution resonates throughout the land for the Jewish people. But none of this would have happened if Esther had *avoided* the conflict (retracting herself like a turtle). Instead, she confronted the conflict and rose to the occasion, *"for such a time as this"* (Esther 4:14).

## **THREE ATTACKERS ... Outwardly Aggressive**

## #1 Wolves ...

Wolves are fierce, savage, and cruel animals that make a terrible howling sound and attack even large animals. They possess immense stamina to travel long distances. They use scent markings to claim their territory, communicating: “This territory is occupied.... This territory is mine!”

- **The word *wolf*** is also used in reference to *people* who are:
  - » Known to be “wolves in sheep’s clothing” by cloaking their intentions beneath an innocent, friendly manner
  - » Known to be forward, direct, and zealous in the seduction of women
  - » Known to “wolf” down food, eating greedily—devouring their food like prey
- The Bible describes the destruction that wolves can cause ...

*“Her officials within her are like **wolves** tearing their prey; they shed blood and kill people to make unjust gain.” (Ezekiel 22:27)*

## #2 Snakes/Serpents/Vipers ...

These are creeping creatures that can also move rapidly. Although many snakes are harmless, they are most often feared for their hissing, rattling, biting, and stinging. They inflict burning pain and cause inflammation where they bite. Considered cunning and subtle, they can also be malicious and deadly poisonous.

- **The word *serpent*** is also used in reference to *people* who are:
  - » Known to be dangerous, treacherous persons
  - » Known to inject injurious venom into people or groups by poisoning their minds, hearts, or reputation
  - » Known to act silently, secretly, and sinuously to inflict injury on others
- The Bible describes the destructive nature of serpents ...

*“They make their tongues as sharp as a **serpent’s**; the poison of **vipers** is on their lips.” (Psalm 140:3)*

## #3 Hornets ...

Hornets are any of the larger social wasps which, because they possess biting mouthparts, can bite and sting at the same time. Just one hornet can mobilize an entire nest to sting aggressively. In a swarm, they can drive cattle and horses to madness, and their formidable stings can also kill human beings.

- **The word *hornet*** is also used in reference to *people* who are:
  - » Known to be excessively angry—or “mad as a hornet”
  - » Known to gather others so as to “swarm” a person or place, thus creating havoc or harm with “stings” (for example, accusations, threats, slander, etc.)
  - » Known to build a “hornet’s nest” of angry, venomous people who can be deadly

— The Bible depicts their devastating ability in this description ...

*“I sent the **hornet** ahead of you, which drove them out before you—also the two Amorite kings. You did not do it with your own sword and bow.” (Joshua 24:12)*

## THREE AVOIDERS ... Inwardly Passive

### #1 Tortoises ...

Tortoises are protected by large, dome-shaped shells that are difficult for predators to crack. They withdraw their necks into their shells by folding them under their spines or folding their necks to the side. Tortoises possess excellent nighttime vision but poor daytime vision because of their color blindness. They have short, sturdy feet famous for moving slowly, partly because of their heavy shells, but also because of their relatively inefficient, sprawling gait.

— **The word *tortoise*** (or **turtle**) is also used in reference to *people* who are:

- » Known for being slow or for being stragglers
- » Known for “withdrawing into a shell” when threatened
- » Known for dawdling or shirking responsibility

— In the Bible, “*any kind of great lizard*” would include **tortoises** (Leviticus 11:29–30).

### #2 Chameleons ...

Chameleons can change to a variety of colors—brown, green, blue, yellow, red, black, or white—in response to temperature, light, and mood. A calm chameleon can be green, but when angry, it can turn yellow. Chameleons possess elongated tongues that can be up to twice the length of their bodies, and their eyes move independently of each other, giving sharp, stereoscopic vision and depth perception.

— **The word *chameleon*** is also used in reference to *people* who are:

- » Known to change their minds or even their characters but only superficially ... merely to be expedient
- » Known for their quick or frequent changes, especially in appearance in order to “fit in”
- » Known to blend in with diverse groups by reflecting each group’s look, behavior, and belief when with the group

— The Bible states, “*These are unclean for you ... the **chameleon***” (Leviticus 11:29–30).

### #3 Weasels ...

Weasels have a reputation for cleverness and guile, especially as they perform a “hypnotic dance” in front of their prey. These small, furry animals can twist and burrow down into small holes. They produce a thick, oily, powerful smelling liquid called musk, used for scent marking and defense.

— **The word *weasel*** is also used in reference to *people* who are:

- » Known to act deviously, unscrupulously, and underhandedly

- » Known to use “weasel words” in order to be evasive or insincere
- » Known to evade or escape from a situation by “weaseling out” of it
- In the Bible, “*the rat*” would include the **weasel** (Leviticus 11:29).

Hunt, J. (2008). *Biblical Counseling Keys on Conflict Resolution: Solving Your People Problems* (pp. 1–8). Dallas, TX: Hope For The Heart.