



Disciplers Bible Studies

GOD RESCUES HIS PEOPLE -- CHAPTERS 8-10

INTRODUCTION

Esther had exposed Haman's evil plot to the king and he had disposed of Haman, but the Jews of the Persian Empire were still in danger. Something had to be done about Haman's decree or the Jewish people would be annihilated by their enemies. The problem was that the decree which had been sent out was irrevocable according to the law of the Medes and the Persians. Having been written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet ring, it was a royal law and could not be changed or annulled. (Daniel 6:8 and Esther 8:8). It seemed like an impossible situation. But that was not a problem for God. God specializes in the impossible! What seems to human eyes to be impossible or unchangeable is not difficult for God. The Scriptures tell us that by the power of God, Abraham's wife, Sarah, conceived and gave birth to a son when she was very old, past the age of child-bearing (Genesis 18:14 and 21:2). When Moses and the Israelites were trapped between the advancing Egyptian armies and the Red Sea, God divided the waters so they were able to go through the midst of the sea and cross over on dry land (Exodus 14:22). In Israel's battle against the Amorites, God listened to Joshua's voice and fought for Israel, causing the sun to stand still in the sky until the battle was won (Joshua 10:13; Habakkuk 3:11). The prophet Jeremiah observed, *Ah, Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You* (Jeremiah 32:17). *Jesus told His disciples, With God all things are possible* (Matthew 19:26).

Have you ever found yourself up against an impossible situation? Have you ever hesitated to pray because you felt something was impossible? You will take courage from God's working in this impossible situation in the Book of Esther. You will see that the impossible is no match for the empowering wisdom and working of God. A decree issued by a man, even though he may be the most powerful man in the world, cannot stand against the power of God.

In these last three chapters, we will see how God rescued His people from an impossible situation and witness the joy and light His salvation brought to their lives. Even to this day the Jews remember each year the day on which Haman's evil decree was subverted and their sorrow was turned to joy and their mourning into a holiday.

Outline of Esther 8-10

- I. Edict of Encouragement for the Jews - Esther 8
- II. Extermination of the Jews' Enemies - Esther 9
- III. Epilogue - Esther 10

I. Edict of Encouragement for the Jews - Esther 8

- A. Property and power given to Mordecai - Esther 8:1-2

Part of Haman's evil plan had been to confiscate the property of the Jews (Esther 3:13), but his property was taken away instead. On the day King Ahasuerus had Haman hanged, he also took Haman's property and gave it to Esther. She in turn appointed Mordecai to oversee it. In addition, when the king found out that Mordecai was Esther's blood relative, he took his signet ring which Haman had used to sanction the killing of the Jews (Esther 3:10) and gave it to Mordecai. Thus, Mordecai was given both the property and the power which Haman had formerly possessed.

- B. Plea of Esther heard - Esther 8:3-8

Clearly, king's sympathies were now with Esther and her people, but still something needed to be done to save the lives of all the Jews in the provinces of Persia. Esther again gathered her courage. She approached the throne of the king with humility and tears. She was the Queen of Persia, the most exalted woman in the land, but she identified herself with her people and was willing to risk all she had in order to save them. Once more Ahasuerus held out his golden scepter and Esther presented her request to him in a most diplomatic way. She was very careful to make her intercession for her people with courteous respect and without placing any blame for the decree upon the king. What she asked was that something might be written to revoke the letters which had been devised by Haman.

King Ahasuerus gently reminded Esther of what he had already done for her. Haman had been hanged and his house given to her. However, he was powerless to revoke a decree which had been written in his name and sealed with his signet ring. From Daniel chapter six we learn that the laws of the Medes and Persians could not be altered. Since it was impossible for Ahasuerus to repeal the law, he gave Esther and Mordecai permission to write their own decree and seal it with his signet ring.

C. Proclamation sent out - Esther 8:9-17

The king's scribes were called to prepare a new decree.

1. Time and places - 8:9

It was now the twenty-third day of the the third month, the month of Sivan, of the year 474 B.C., just over two months since Haman's decree had gone out. More than eight months still remained for the Jews to prepare to defend themselves against those who might attack them.

The new decree, dictated by Mordecai, was sent to the Jews, the satraps, the governors, and the princes of all one hundred and twenty-seven Persian provinces from India to Ethiopia. It was written in the script and the language of each province and also in the script and language of the Jews. Haman's decree had likewise been sent to each province in its own language and script, but Haman's decree had not been translated into Hebrew for the Jews.

2. Contents - 8:10-13

The new decree was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with his signet ring. It gave the Jews the right to assemble together to protect their lives, the right to kill anyone who might attack them, the right to plunder the possessions of those they destroyed, and the right to do all of this on one day only — the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar (the day which Haman's decree specified for destruction of the Jews.) The purpose of the new decree was to enable the Jews to be ready to avenge themselves on their enemies. Instead of being defenseless against those who would destroy them, they would be allowed to retaliate. Joyce G. Baldwin in her commentary *Esther* notes, "This was justice, not revenge. It was vindication, not vengeance."

3. Couriers - 8:10b and 14

The decree was sent out by couriers riding on the swiftest royal horses. They delivered to the Jews the good news that they did not need to die, but could defend themselves and destroy their enemies. One commentator has pointed out that Christians are the King's couriers in the world today and that we are sent out to proclaim to a world under condemnation that doomed sinners need not die. We are to hasten to proclaim this good news to the ends of the earth in order that people might not perish but have everlasting life.

4. Reaction - 8:15-17

After the issuing of the first decree, Haman had sat

down to drink with the king (Esther 3:15). After the new decree was issued, Mordecai went out into the presence of the people. His clothing of royal Persian colors and crown of gold announced his new position as "prime minister" in place of Haman. The word crown (*teret*) in verse 15 is a different Hebrew word than the one used to refer to the royal crown ("*keter*") in Esther 1:11 and 2:17. Mordecai's crown was more likely a turban or headband such as a coronet.

After Haman's decree the city had been bewildered (Esther 3:15), but the reaction to the new decree was quite different. The whole city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad.

a. Light and gladness, joy and honor - 8:16

The Jews throughout the land rejoiced. The new decree and the promotion of Mordecai were a clear indication that the king's sympathies were with them. Although God's name is still not mentioned, it is clear that He had undertaken for them and brought them out of the darkness of condemnation and into His light of gladness, joy, and honor. In the same way, God has undertaken for believers to bring us out of darkness and into the light of His love.

In the Old Testament, God's Law disclosed that the wages of sin is death. The apostle Paul confirmed this in his letter to the Romans (Romans 6:23), adding that *all have sinned* (Romans 3:23). Sin and death entered the world through Adam and spread to all men (Romans 5:12). Therefore all are under condemnation. Because He is just, God would not revoke His Law, but He was so willing to save sinners from death that He sent His own Son to make salvation possible. (See Ezekiel 18:23; John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9.) The apostle Paul wrote, *the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death* (Romans 8:2).

b. Proselytes - 8:17

It was obvious to all the people of the land that the Jews were being protected by their God. It was also obvious that the king of Persia favored the Jews. As a result many people sided with the Jews and even became proselytes to the Jewish religion. It is interesting to note that this is the only place in the Old Testament that makes reference to people of other races becoming Jews.

II. Extermination of Enemies - Esther 9

A. Reversal - Esther 9:1-4

The thirteenth day of the twelfth month arrived and the enemies of the Jews went against them, hoping to

overpower them. However, the opposite occurred and the victims became the victors. The Jews gathered together to resist those who wanted to harm them, and no one was able to successfully oppose them. These verses seem to imply a supernatural influence which drove the people and the leaders to support the Jewish people: The fear of them fell upon all the people (verse 2). Also, all the government officials helped the Jews because they feared Mordecai. Obviously, it was politically advantageous for them to align themselves with Mordecai who was now in a place of great power in the land.

B. Retaliation - Esther 9:5-18

In spite of the fact that many people sided with the Jews, there were still those who took advantage of Haman's decree and attacked them. Remember that those who did not attack the Jews were in no danger, but those who did go against them certainly took their lives in their hands. There were 800 people in Shushan and 75,000 in the Persian provinces who were foolish enough to subject themselves to the second decree. The ten sons of Haman were also killed.

Even though the second decree had given the Jews permission to plunder the possessions of those they killed, the writer of Esther repeats three times (verses 10, 15, and 16) that they did not lay their hands on the plunder. In the society of that day, victors were expected to take the spoils of the battle. Surely the people of the Persian empire noticed the restraint shown by the Jews. It was a proof of the purity of their motives — that the killing of their enemies was due to justice and not out of revenge. All God's people should stand out from the rest of the world in such ways as this. How would those around you know that you are a child of God? How do your actions stand out as different and testify to your faith?

After the first day of killing, King Ahasuerus offered to grant Queen Esther another petition. Esther's request was that another day be given to the Jews in Shushan to destroy their enemies and that the ten sons of Haman be hanged on the gallows. At first thought, it seems offensive that Esther would make such a request. But remember that the Jews would only kill those who attacked them. Under Haman's decree, the Jews were only to be attacked on the thirteenth day of Adar. Apparently there still remained some who were hostile to the Jews who took things into their own hands and planned to extend the terms of Haman's decree for one more day. The Jews needed to be allowed to defend themselves. The public display of the bodies of Haman's sons hanging on the gallows would definitely discourage those who were still plotting to destroy the Jews. The message was — this is what will happen to you if you go against the Jews! Esther's request was carried out,

and three hundred more men (in addition to the five hundred who were killed on the first day) were killed in Shushan on the fourteenth day of Adar.

In summary, the Jews in the provinces gathered together on the thirteenth day of Adar to defend themselves against their enemies who tried to destroy them, and then they rested on the fourteenth day with feasting and gladness. The Jews in Shushan gathered together against their enemies on the thirteenth and fourteenth days of Adar, and they rested and feasted and were glad on the fifteenth. Observance of the victory over their enemies became an annual custom for the Jews. The plot which was intended to destroy them resulted in a feast which brought them together in national unity and joy.

C. Remembrance - Esther 9:19-32

1. The people's custom -9:19

The Jews in the provinces spontaneously began to observe the fourteenth day of Adar as a holiday.

2. Mordecai's letters - 9:20-25

Mordecai sent letters to the Jews in all the Persian provinces. He called them to establish the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar as an annual celebration to commemorate the days on which the the evil plot of Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, was overturned. It was the way they experienced rest from their enemies and saw their sorrow turned to joy. These two days were to be filled with feasting and joy, sending presents to one another, and giving gifts to the poor.

3. Perpetual memorial - 9:26-28

These days of celebration were to be called *Purim* because Haman had used the "pur," or lot, to determine the most auspicious day for the execution of the Jews. *Purim* is the plural of "pur." Although "pur" is a Persian word, it was pluralized in the Hebrew manner of adding "im," (just as the plural of cherub is cherubim and the plural of seraph is seraphim.) *Purim* would bring to their remembrance all that had happened as a result of Haman's plot.

Purim was established for all Jews and their descendants and for all who would join them. The days were to be remembered and observed throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city. *Purim* continues to be celebrated today by the Jewish people. The specified days in the Jewish month of Adar usually fall early in the month of March. Children arrive at the synagogue dressed as their favorite character from the story. As the rabbi reads the Book of Esther, the children boo and stomp their feet every time Haman's

name is mentioned. Esther's and Mordecai's names bring cheers. The feast of Purim is a time of fun and feasting and giving gifts to friends, neighbors, and those who are needy. It is a memorial of joy, celebrating the providence of God in caring for His people. It is an opportunity to remember that God is sovereign.

4. Royal command - 9:29-32

Queen Esther confirmed all that Mordecai had written (Esther 9:20-25) by joining him in writing to all the Jews in the one hundred and twenty-seven Persian provinces. These new letters were filled with words of peace and truth. In addition to the call to celebration, the letters also concerned matters of fasting and lamenting (Esther 9:31). A look at a modern Jewish calendar will show that the thirteenth day of Adar is designated as the Fast of Esther.

III. Epilogue - Esther 10

In closing, our writer gives a brief look at what took place in Persia after the destruction of the enemies of the Jews. All in all, things were pretty much the same: the same kingdom, the same king, the same people in the same provinces. But Haman was replaced by Mordecai. Evil, corruption, and self-serving schemes were replaced by peace, good, and service to others.

A. Ahasuerus' power - Esther 10:1-2

The fact that Ahasuerus was receiving tribute, or taxes, from his kingdom and from the islands or coastlands attests to his power and his wealth. All the mighty things he had done were recorded for history in the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia.

B. Mordecai's greatness - Esther 10:2-3

Mordecai was second only to King Ahasuerus in the Persian Empire and great among his own people, the Jews. He was a man who sought the good of his people and looked out for their welfare. Unlike Haman, his priority was his people and not himself.

The apostle Paul, in Ephesians 1:11, wrote that God *works all things according to the counsel of His will*. Certainly the Book of Esther is an apt illustration of that. Even though God's name is never mentioned, His hand was obviously at work behind the scenes directing the destinies of men and nations. This was not only good news for the Jews of Persia in the fifth century B. C., but it is good news for you and me today. It is news of hope, comfort, and confidence to those who love God and have turned to Him through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember, even when God seems out of your sight, you are never out of His sight.

Applications

1. The Jews celebrated the fourteenth and fifteenth of Adar as days of rest from their enemies (Esther 9:17-18). Jesus Christ has given us rest from our enemies, sin and Satan, and that is cause for celebration on a daily basis. Do you rejoice every day in God's great gift of salvation to you? How is that joy evident in your life?
2. God often uses unexpected people in unexpected ways. Esther and Mordecai were ordinary people who allowed themselves to be used of God. God honored them. Will you open yourself to God so that He might use you in such a time as this (Esther 4:14)? How will you show God that you are willing to be used by Him? Will you follow the examples of prayer, fasting and obedience which are given in the Book of Esther?
3. Are you a person who is self-absorbed and self-promoting like Haman, or are you genuinely concerned about and eager to serve God and others as were Mordecai and Esther? Whose welfare do you look out for other than your own?