

X. Preservation of the Jews, 9:1-19

A. Power

TEXT: 9:1-5

- 1 Now in the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king's commandment and his decree drew near to be put in execution, on the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have rule over them, (whereas it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them,)
- 2 the Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt: and no man could withstand them; for the fear of them was fallen upon all the peoples.
- 3 And all the princes of the provinces, and the satraps, and the governors, and they that did the king's business, helped the Jews; because the fear of Mordecai was fallen upon them.
- 4 For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went forth throughout all the provinces; for the man Mordecai waxed greater and greater.
- 5 And the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and with slaughter and destruction, and did what they would unto them that hated them.

Today's English Version, 9:1-5

The thirteenth day of Adar came, the day on which the royal proclamation was to take effect, the day when the enemies of the Jews were hoping to get them in their power. But instead, the Jews triumphed over them. In the Jewish quarter of every city in the empire the Jews organized to attack anyone who tried to harm them. People everywhere were afraid of them, and no one could stand against them. In fact, all the provincial officials—governors, administrators, and royal representatives—helped the Jews because they were all afraid of Mordecai. It was well known throughout the empire that Mordecai was now a powerful man in the palace and was growing more powerful. So the Jews could do what they wanted with their enemies. They attacked them with swords and slaughtered them.

COMMENTS

v. 1-2 *Reversal of Massacre*: For comments on the date for assault upon the Jews see our comments on 8:9-14. The Jews prepared as their enemies prepared and they were surely aware of one another's preparations for they both had nearly nine months to make preparations for the great struggle. Those who hated the Jews and anticipated slaughtering and plundering their families and goods suffered a calamitous reversal. The Hebrew word *shelot* translated *rule* in verses one and two, means more precisely, *prevail over*.

The Jews gathered in "their" cities through all the provinces. This does not mean there were cities set aside for exclusive habitation by the Jews, but cities where Jews had formed an element in the population. It was not the intention of the Jews to provoke hostility by going where they did not belong. They were not the aggressors. They simply knew that for purposes of defense, there would be strength in numbers, so they grouped together in any city or town where enough Jews lived to organize their resistance. They were so well organized and highly motivated "no man could withstand them." They fought with such ferocity, all the people of the Persian empire stood in awe and fear of them. The Jews were faced with the possibility of total extinction. It was all precipitated by personal prejudice and a personal vendetta. There were no great issues of territorial infringements, rebellions, or national sovereignty involved. The war against them was irrational, unjust and genocidal. They had done nothing whatsoever to deserve such murder. Right was on their side. They fought with abandon to preserve their race and to uphold the justness of the cause.

v. 3-5 *Regency of Mordecai*: In addition to the fervor with which the Jews fought against those who attacked them, they had on their side the Queen (Esther) of the empire and Mordecai, prime-minister to the king. Many ruling and administrative officials of the Persian empire *helped* the Jews. One of the reasons behind the aid of the officials of the provinces is their fear or respect for the position of Mordecai, the Jew. Mordecai's

authority was, of course, equal to that which Haman had possessed—second to the emperor. In addition, Mordecai's greatness was much more enhanced and respected because he cared for others and used his office for their sake and not his own glory as Haman had done (cf. 8:2, 15; 10:3). Verse 4 is somewhat different in the Septuagint, reading thusly: "For the decree of the king was being enforced that he (Mordecai) should be reputed in all the kingdom." And, strangely enough, verse 5 is entirely omitted from the Septuagint. The Hebrew word *ratzah* is translated *what they would* in verse 5, but the Hebrew word has more the connotation, *what was good or acceptable, as they saw fit*. The Hebrew resistance was not unbridled willfulness, but they were able to defend themselves against their enemies to whatever extent they deemed necessary. Their enemies were defeated on every hand, but the Jews did not plunder their enemies property—although the Jews had official sanction to do so!

B. Progress

TEXT: 9:6-15

- 6 And in Shushan the palace the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men.
- 7 And Parshandatha, and Dalphon, and Aspatha,
8 and Poratha, and Adalia, and Aridatha,
9 and Parmashta, and Arisai, and Aridai, and Vaizatha,
10 the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Jews' enemy, slew they; but on the spoil they laid not their hand.
- 11 On that day the number of those that were slain in Shushan the palace was brought before the king.
- 12 And the king said unto Esther the queen, The Jews have slain and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the palace, and the ten sons of Haman; what then have they done in the rest of the king's provinces! Now what is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: or what is thy request further? and it shall be done.

- 13 Then said Esther, If it please the king, let it be granted to the Jews that are in Shushan to do to-morrow also according unto this day's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows.
- 14 And the king commanded it so to be done: and a decree was given out in Shushan; and they hanged Haman's ten sons.
- 15 And the Jews that were in Shushan gathered themselves together on the fourteenth day also of the month of Adar, and slew three hundred men in Shushan; but on the spoil they laid not their hand.

Today's English Version, 9:6-15

In Susa, the capital city itself, the Jews killed five hundred people. Among them were the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews: Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha. However, there was no looting.

That same day the number of people killed in Susa was reported to the king. He then said to Queen Esther, "In Susa alone the Jews have killed five hundred people, including Haman's ten sons. What must they have done out in the provinces! What do you want now? You shall have it. Tell me what else you want, and you shall have it."

Esther answered, "If it please Your Majesty, let the Jews in Susa do again tomorrow what they were allowed to do today. And have the bodies of Haman's ten sons hung from the gallows." The king ordered this to be done, and the proclamation was issued in Susa. The bodies of Haman's ten sons were publicly displayed. On the fourteenth day of Adar the Jews of Susa got together again and killed three hundred more people in the city. But again, they did no looting.

COMMENTS

v. 6-10 *Names*: The Masoretic text requires that the names of the ten sons of Haman be written in a perpendicular column on

the right-hand side of the page, with the *vav* ("and"), on the left-hand side. The origin of this may be from the tradition that the ten sons were hanged on a tall stake, one above the other. It is also traditional that when the book of Esther is read at Purim celebration, the names of the ten sons plus the word "ten" are all to be read in one breath, because, as the Talmud states, "they all died together."

All the names except Adalia have Persian meanings: Parshandatha means "given to Persia"; Dalphon means "arrogant"; Aspatha means "horse"; Poratha means "having many chariots"; Aridatha means "liberal"; Parmashta means "greatest"; Arisai means "to conquer"; Aridai means "to give"; and Vaizatha means "strong as the wind." Since much of the book of Esther has as its source the royal chronicles, the author was probably impressed with the importance of these ten sons of the former prime-minister and decided such documentation would be beneficial for all subsequent readers. The listing of the names certainly fits in with the precise and exact character of the whole book of Esther.

In verse 10 we are told that the Jews did not lay their hands on the property of those they killed. The edict given by Haman (3:13) was that the Jewish victims should have their property plundered. When Xerxes allowed Mordecai to give official permission to the Jews to resist the massacre, permission was also given (8:11) to plunder the property of their attackers. The fact that the Jews did *not* seize the property of those they killed in their resistance is mentioned a number of times (9:10, 15, 16) in order to emphasize that they were concerned only with defending themselves. They were not motivated by greed in the grizzly work of lethally defending their lives.

v. 11-15 Numbers: The king received an official report of the number slain. It was customary even in ancient days to keep a "body count." In the Babylonian transcript of the Behistun Inscription the numbers of those slain in battle are given with precise exactness (546, 2024, 4203, etc.). The king was careful to keep himself informed on the progress of the resistance. Because of this, the Jews knew they were not left to kill indiscriminately.

The area of the hill where the palace complex stood was more than 100 acres. Archaeologists have found the ruins of many

houses in this area. It was probably densely populated. It is not at all improbable that 500 men (9:6) would be slain in their attempt to attack the Jews within the palace complex itself.

When the king heard the number slain within the walls of the acropolis (hill area), he immediately informed Esther (probably to prove to her that he most certainly had the best interests of his queen and her people at heart). He also knew this initial success of the Jewish resistance would not be all that was needed to wipe out the violence aimed at the Jews. So the king offers further assistance to whatever extent his queen has determined to be needful.

Perhaps Mordecai had information that a second day of purging the city of those plotting violence against the Jews would be necessary, Susa was, after all, the chief capital and would naturally be the center of anti-Jewish violence. Mordecai knew how matters really stood, and as prime-minister advised the queen of Persia, that another day would be necessary to rid the capital city of the avowed murderers. It is really doubtful that Esther would have made this request for another day without the prompting of Mordecai. The request for making the dead bodies of Haman's sons public spectacles was to provide a strong deterrent to any non-Jews who had not participated in the violence but might be contemplating it! Capital punishment of those convicted of capital crimes is both biblical and practical. Capital punishment serves not only as a deterrent but also produces a proper execution of justice (see our Special Study, "The Christian and War," *Isaiah, Vol. II*, pg. 72, College Press).

Ancient cities usually consisted of a walled portion (sometimes with an acropolis or hill where the governmental complex stood) and an unwalled portion. Many people lived in houses outside the city walls and usually fled inside the walls when sufficiently warned in advance of an enemy's approach. The 300 slain (9:14) on the day following the slaying of the initial 500 were probably people residing outside the palace complex, perhaps outside the walls of Susa. The necessity of taking two days in the capital city of Susa to dispatch all those who would attack the Jews apparently resulted in a difference in days of celebrating the victory (cf. 9:19). The Jews of Susa could not "rest" on the 14th of Adar with those in other places of the empire for they had to continue their struggle against their foes on that day.

C. Peace

TEXT: 9:16-19

- 16 And the other Jews that were in the king's provinces gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives, and had rest from their enemies, and slew of them that hated them seventy and five thousand; but on the spoil they laid not their hand.
- 17 This was done on the thirteenth day of the month Adar; and on the fourteenth day of the same they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness.
- 18 But the Jews that were in Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth day thereof, and on the fourteenth thereof; and on the fifteenth day of the same they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness.
- 19 Therefore do the Jews of the villages, that dwell in the un-walled towns, make the fourteenth day of the month Adar a day of gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another.

Today's English Version, 9:16-19

The Jews in the provinces also organized and defended themselves. They rid themselves of their enemies by killing seventy-five thousand people who hated them. But they did no looting. This was on the thirteenth day of Adar. On the next day, the fourteenth, there was no more killing, and they made it a joyful day of feasting. The Jews of Susa, however, made the fifteenth a holiday, since they had slaughtered their enemies on the thirteenth and fourteenth and then stopped on the fifteenth. This is why Jews who live in small towns observe the fourteenth day of the month of Adar as a joyous holiday, a time for feasting and giving gifts of food to one another.

COMMENTS

v. 16-17 *Cessation*: Out in the "provinces" (which included the entire Persian empire—from Asia Minor to India) the Jews

organized and mobilized themselves. With the help of the Persian officials who had Persian and provincial troops at their command, the Jews killed 75,000 people who had attacked them on the 13th day of Adar. The LXX has the number 15,000 here rather than 75,000 and some critics have declared the Hebrew text to be "incredible." Rawlinson says that the number 75,000 is believable. When one considers the vastness of the empire, the wide dispersion of the Jewish communities within that empire, the fact that the Persian officials throughout the empire gave aid to the Jews (probably with their troops), and the fact that the Persian officials were not all that careful to preserve the lives of "provincials;" one must admit that the number 75,000 is more credible than 15,000. The Jews killed 800 in the city of Susa alone. Multiply that number by 94 cities and you have slightly over 75,000. Do not forget there were 127 *provinces* in the empire (8:9). The author repeats the fact that the Jews did not plunder the properties of their dead enemies.

They needed only one day out in the provinces to kill all those who hated them; that was all done on the 13th of Adar (February-March). On the day following (while the Jews in the capital city of Susa were still fighting) these Jews of the provinces "rested" and declared a holiday. The Hebrew word *nucha* is translated *rest*. *Nucha* is more generic than *shavat* (Sabbath). *Nucha* connotes physical repose and tranquility while *shavat* denotes the legislative, ceremonial, spiritual rest.

v. 18-19 *Celebration*: The circumstances of the struggle within the city of Susa (two days duration) resulted in a difference regarding the date of the day of rejoicing between the Jews of the capital city Susa, and the Jews of the provinces. The Jews of Susa could not "rest" until the third day which was the 15th of Adar; the provincial Jews rested on the 14th of Adar. When Esther and Mordecai attempted to set up a national celebration for this great deliverance some difficulty arose as to which day would be set aside for all Jews to commemorate it. It was diplomatically decided that both days would be kept (9:21).

We may learn the following lessons from this chapter:

1. When justice and truth is on the side of a people, they command the respect of reasonable men.

2. The forces of human government are ordained of God as tools for preservation of ordered society.
3. The consequences of a man's evil is often suffered by his offspring.
4. While it may be ethical to preserve the sanctity of human life by force, it is not ethical to take by force another's property.
5. Memorializing great victories of justice with holidays has didactic benefit for future generations.

CHAPTER 9:1-9

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the purpose of the Jews "gathering" in their cities?
2. How did the princes and satraps and governors help the Jews?
3. How far did the Jews go in destroying those who hated them?
4. What is peculiar about the Masoretic listing of the ten sons of Haman?
5. Why did Esther ask for a second day for killing those who hated the Jews?
6. What does the exactness of the names and numbers of those slain say about the source of the book of Esther?
7. Why were there two days for the celebration of the feast of Purim?