

IX. Proclamation of Xerxes, 8:1-17

A. Mordecai's Reward

TEXT: 8:1-2

- 1 On that day did the king Ahasuerus give the house of Haman the Jews' enemy unto Esther the queen. And Mordecai came before the king; for Esther had told what he was unto her.
- 2 And the king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it unto Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.

Today's English Version, 8:1-2

That same day King Xerxes gave Queen Esther all the property of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. Esther told the king that Mordecai was related to her, and from then on Mordecai was allowed to enter the king's presence. The king took off his ring with his seal on it (which he had taken back from Haman) and gave it to Mordecai. Esther put Mordecai in charge of Haman's property.

COMMENTS

v. 1 Endowed: When a criminal was executed, everything that belonged to him became the property of the royal treasury. His estate was either used by the king for his own personal pleasure or for the programs of his government. Sometimes the king would make such an estate a gift to those who had been wronged by the criminal. In this case the king gave Haman's fortune to Esther. As pointed out in 3:9-11 Haman's fortune probably exceeded ten million dollars. This was an extraordinary thing to happen to a Jewish woman of the exiles. Some of the male exiles among the Jews became rich (e.g. Daniel), but for a woman to reach such heights of power and property was unheard of.

Haman is called "the Jew's enemy." Haman continued to be

regarded as the prototype of the enemy of the Jews throughout the ages. It became customary to make loud noise in the synagogues to drown out his name whenever mentioned in the Purim reading of the book of Esther. A late 19th century Jewish work of art from Poland pictures Haman leading Mordecai through the streets of Susa. Haman's wife Zeresh, mistaking him for Mordecai, dumps slop on her husband from the window of her house.

From this day forward Mordecai became a high official ("came before the king") and attended the king's court.

v. 2 *Empowered*: The king had retrieved the very important signet ring which he had given to Haman (3:10). He took it off his own finger and gave it to Mordecai. Thus the power so greedily coveted and wickedly used by Haman was transferred to the man he had hated so vehemently. Mordecai could act in the king's name with the same power Haman formerly possessed. And Esther, although she would not want to insult the king by giving to Mordecai what had been given to her, did the next best thing and appointed him administrator of Haman's estate. Mordecai moved into the palatial dwellings formerly occupied by Haman and was thus provided a residence befitting his new position. No doubt, Mordecai ordered the removal of that gruesome "gallows" and the body of Haman before he moved in.

B. Monarch's Reparation

TEXT: 8:3-8

- 3 And Esther spake yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews.
- 4 Then the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre. So Esther arose, and stood before the king.
- 5 And she said, If it please the king, and if I have found favor in his sight, and the thing seem right before the king, and I be pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters devised

- by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews that are in all the king's provinces:
- 6 for how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?
- 7 Then the king Ahasuerus said unto Esther the queen and to Mordecai the Jew, Behold, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and him they have hanged upon the gallows, because he laid his hand upon the Jews.
- 8 Write ye also to the Jews, as it pleaseth you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring; for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse.

Today's English Version, 8:3-8

Then Esther spoke to the king again, throwing herself at his feet and crying. She begged him to do something to stop the evil plot that Haman, the descendant of Agag, had made against the Jews. The king held out the gold scepter to her, so she stood up and said, "If it please Your Majesty, and if you care about me and if it seems right to you, please issue a proclamation to keep Haman's orders from being carried out — those orders that the son of Hammedatha the descendant of Agag gave for the destruction of all the Jews in the empire. How can I endure it if this disaster comes on my people, and my own relatives are killed?"

King Xerxes then said to Queen Esther and Mordecai, the Jew, "Look, I have hanged Haman for his plot against the Jews, and I have given Esther his property. But a proclamation issued in the king's name and stamped with the royal seal cannot be revoked. You may, however, write to the Jews whatever you like; and you may write it in my name and stamp it with the royal seal."

COMMENTS

v. 3-6 *Dilemma*: Haman has been properly dispatched. He is no longer a problem to the Jewish people. However, his wicked

machinations still exist in the form of a Persian decree. Persian laws cannot be changed. So Esther falls at the feet of the king begging him with tears to take royal action and reverse the decree Haman tricked the king into publishing throughout the empire. The king indicated his readiness to do what he could to fulfill Esther's plea by holding out to her the royal scepter. He signaled that he would give her the full force of the throne to help her.

Esther may have had some doubts, now that the king knew she was a Jewess that she would be "pleasing" to the king for she said, "If I have found favor . . ." She also appealed to the king's pragmatic instincts when she said, ". . . and the thing seem *right* before the king . . ." The Hebrew word *kasher* does not mean right in the sense of *ethical* right, but in the sense of *advantageousness, successfulness, propriety*. It is the word used by modern Hebrews to designate *kosher* food, etc., meaning ritually clean, legitimate, or that which is sanctioned. She had earlier cautioned the king that Haman's genocide of the Jews would be economic disaster to the Persians.

But she and her people are on the horns of a dilemma. The law of the Medes and Persians cannot be changed. Not even the king can change what has been decreed and sealed with the royal signet ring (cf. Esther 3:7-15 and Daniel 6:14-15).

v. 7-8 *Deliverance*: The king points out to Esther that he has done what he could without violating a fundamental policy necessary to sustaining the very structure of Persian government. The king has executed Haman, the arch enemy of the Jews, and given Haman's position and power over to Esther and Mordecai to wield. The king cannot, without destroying the very fibre of Persian government, rescind his former edict for the massacre of the Jews. But the king has a suggestion that will not only make possible the saving of the Jewish people but will also keep the most fundamental law of all Persia intact. He suggests, or infers: "It is impossible to grant your request to rescind my former edict, because any edict sealed with the signet ring of the king is irrevocable, and the edict Haman made against the Jews was sealed with my signet ring. However, I have given you the power of my signet ring now. Surely you can, with all the royal power at your

disposal, devise some way to save your people." The king is apparently hinting that Esther and Mordecai compose another decree that will provide some way for the Jews to counteract the decree authorizing the Persians to attack them. The Hebrew word *tov* is translated *pleaseth* in the ASV, but more correctly means, *good*. In other words, the king said, "You write to the Jews what you think would be *good* for them in these circumstances, and seal it with the king's ring . . ." So the king repared, in a sense, the disastrous decree made previously by giving both the power and the suggestion as to what to do. This was all Esther and Mordecai needed.

C. Massacre Resisted

TEXT: 8:9-14

- 9 Then were the king's scribes called at that time, in the third month, which is the month Sivan, on the three and twentieth day thereof; and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded unto the Jews, and to the satraps, and the governors and princes of the provinces which are from India unto Ethiopia, a hundred twenty and seven provinces, unto every people after their language, and to the Jews according to their writing, and according to their language.
- 10 And he wrote in the name of king Ahasuerus, and sealed it with the king's ring, and sent letters by posts on horseback, riding on swift steeds that were used in the king's service, bred of the stud:
- 11 wherein the king granted the Jews that were in every city to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them, their little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey,
- 12 upon one day in all the provinces of king Ahasuerus, namely, upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar.

- 13 A copy of the writing, that the decree should be given out in every province, was published unto all the peoples, and that the Jews should be ready against that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.
- 14 So the posts that rode upon swift steeds that were used in the king's service went out, being hastened and pressed on by the king's commandment; and the decree was given out in Shushan the palace.

Today's English Version, 8:9-14

This happened on the twenty-third day of the third month, the month of Sivan. Mordecai called the king's secretaries and dictated letters to the Jews and to the governors, administrators, and officials of all the 127 provinces from India to Sudan. The letters were written to each province in its own language and system of writing and to the Jews in their language and system of writing. Mordecai had the letters written in the name of King Xerxes, and he stamped them with the royal seal. They were delivered by riders mounted on fast horses from the royal stables.

These letters explained that the king would allow the Jews in every city to organize for self-defense. If they were attacked by armed men of any nationality in any province, they could fight back and destroy them along with their wives and children; they could slaughter them to the last man and take their possessions. This decree was to take effect throughout the Persian Empire on the day set for the slaughter of the Jews, the thirteenth of Adar, the twelfth month. It was to be proclaimed as law and made known to everyone in every province, so that the Jews would be ready to take revenge on their enemies when that day came. At the king's command the riders mounted royal horses and rode off at top speed. The decree was also made public in Susa, the capital city.

COMMENTS

v. 9-10 *Letters and Languages*: Verse 9 is one of the longest sentences in the Hebrew Old Testament and is, in fact, the longest

sentence in the Hebrew Hagiographa (O.T. books of poetry and wisdom). Haman's decree had gone out on the 13th of Nisan (Jewish first month corresponding to our March-April). Two months later, on the 23rd of Sivan (Jewish third month corresponding to our May-June), Mordecai issues his decree in the name of the king. The revelation of Haman's plot and his execution would surely have occurred shortly after his decree to massacre the Jews had been published. Why then did Mordecai wait two months to issue his decree for the Jews to defend themselves? Probably for reasons of political protocol and subtlety. It would also allow time for better preparations and decrease the margin for political errors to be made.

Haman's edict was not to go into effect until the 13th of Adar (Jewish twelfth month corresponding to our February-March). Mordecai's edict was issued in the third month. There would be ample time for the Jews (as much as eight months or more) to organize themselves, to collect arms and make all necessary preparations to resist the decreed massacre. For the division of the Persian empire see comments on 1:1-2. The empire was composed of about 60 nations. The Persian rulers probably divided these 60 nations into 127 Persian provinces. The edict of Mordecai was sent throughout the whole Persian empire, from Asia Minor on the west to India on the east and from southern Russia on the north to Ethiopia on the south. There were many languages and dialects into which this edict had to be translated. Persian scribes had to be multi-lingual experts. The Jews had not received copies of the edict of Haman ordering their slaughter and were left to learn their danger indirectly from the people among whom they lived. Mordecai took care that the Jews would not have to learn of their right to fight against their enemies second-handedly from their neighbors. He sent copies of the edict to the Jews in their own language.

The Hebrew phrase describing the way in which these letters were carried throughout the empire is: "*bassusim rokevey harekesh ha'achasheteranim beney harammakim*" and literally translated would be, "on horses, riders on swift steeds, male offspring of

royal mares.” In other words, the Persian postal system and the royal palace spared nothing to get the message out with speed and official sanction. The Persian postal system was unique for that era. The Persian emperor could expect to receive mail through it from the farthest reaches of his empire within one week after its posting.

v. 11-14 *Legislation*: Mordecai’s message to the whole empire was that, in the name of the king, the Jews were permitted to organize, unite and prepare to “stand” for their life. They were given permission to resist any aggression by any people. Their resistance could go so far as to “destroy, slay, and cause to perish,” all the power of any people or province that would assault them. The Hebrew word *hatzarim* is translated *assault* and is from a root word meaning, besiege, show hostility, treat as a foe. The edict of Mordecai specifically allows only defensive action. The Jews were not permitted to attack unless attacked. Of course, once the Jews were attacked they would do their best to survive. They were granted the liberty to slay even women and children just as Haman’s edict permitted their women and children to be slain (3:13). The Jews were also granted permission to seize the property of any people who should assault them. Some writers of the past have accused the Jews of aggressive assault upon the Persians on the 13th of Adar but there is no historical evidence to support such accusations.

So, since the edict they carried was a very unusual commandment of the king of Persia, the government’s “pony express” riders made a point to be swifter than they had ever been to deliver the copies of it to every province in the empire. The reason for more haste than usual may have been to provide an opportunity for further communications between the provinces and the royal court in case there might be questions about the authenticity of the edict. It was an unusual edict! Few kings would ever issue conflicting edicts such as these which would allow actual civil war to take place within his kingdom!

D. Multitudes Rejoice

TEXT: 8:15-17

- 15 And Mordecai went forth from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a robe of fine linen and purple: and the city of Shushan shouted and was glad.
- 16 The Jews had light and gladness, and joy and honor.
- 17 And in every province, and in every city, withersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had gladness and joy, a feast and a good day. And many from among the peoples of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews was fallen upon them.

Today's English Version, 8:15-17

Mordecai left the palace, wearing royal robes of blue and white, a cloak of fine purple linen, and a magnificent gold crown. Then the streets of Susa rang with cheers and joyful shouts. For the Jews there was joy and relief, happiness and a sense of victory. In every city and province, wherever the king's proclamation was read, the Jews held a joyful holiday with feasting and happiness. In fact, many other people became Jews, because they were afraid of them now.

COMMENTS

v. 15-16 *Passions*: Mordecai was apparently given royal robes to wear signifying his appointment by the king to the position once held by Haman — prime minister. The king probably gave him robes from his own palace wardrobes. A “great” crown of gold was given Mordecai. The Hebrew word for crown here is *'atereth* and not the word *kether* which is used in 2:17 to designate Esther's royal crown of office. Mordecai's crown was one which

would be plainly inferior to the king's crown, but great enough to symbolize his high office. Whereas the city of Susa had formerly been upset and perplexed at the edict of Haman (3:15) to slaughter the Jews, now the city shouts its gladness that the Jews will be able to defend themselves. The Hebrew word *tzahalah* is translated *shout* and is often translated *to neigh* like a horse. The majority of men are possessed of a fundamental sense of justice and right. Only a very few (like Haman) take pleasure in the sufferings of others and are so perverted they have no sense of justice. Most of the people of Susa, even though Persian, would be glad that the Jews would have, at least, the liberty of self-defense.

As for the Jews, there was great rejoicing. The word *orah* means *light* in the literal sense but can also mean happiness, prosperity, truth or passion in the figurative sense. It probably means happiness in this context (cf. also Isa. 58:8).

v. 17 *Proselytes*: The Hebrew text uses the word *rabbim* (from the root *ravav*) and is translated *many* from among the peoples . . . became Jews. . . . One commentator says, "It can only have been a small minority of the population in each city that took this view (becoming Jewish proselytes)." However, the word *rabbim* means myriads, much, abundance, great, vast, so *many* of the peoples did become Jewish proselytes. Jewish commentators are reluctant to admit that *many* uncircumcised Persian subjects from all over the empire actually became Jewish proselytes. One Jewish commentator writes, "The Hebrew verb is a denominative from *Yehudi*, 'Jew.' Since nowhere else, either in the Bible or in Rabbinic Hebrew, is this verb used to denote proselytization, it may be argued with some reason that a better translation is 'took the part of the Jews.' " However, the Hebrew word *mitheyhedim* is a participle; a participle is a verbal adjective. That is, a participle actively modifies the noun of the sentence. This participle indicates that the "many" were *becoming Jewish*. This being the case, *many* who were proselyted to Judaism in Esther's day may have been the ancestors of many who today call themselves Jews. Ezra (2:59-63) found of the approximately 50,000 Jews who returned to Palestine after the exile at least 652 who could not prove they were Jews. According to the book, *The Thirteenth Tribe*, by

Arthur Koestler, pub. Random House, (the author himself a Jew), most East-European "Jews" today are descended from the Khazars. The Khazars were Caucasians of southern Russia who were proselyted to Judaism about 900 A.D. According to Jacob Gertenhaus (in *Christianity Today*, 3-13-70), no Jew today can trace his ancestry beyond 200-300 years backward. Exclusive genetic purity of the Jewish race began to disappear as a result of the Assyrian and Babylonian exile. The many Gentiles who became Jewish proselytes here in the days of Esther is a case in point! Most Jews today are no more genetically pure Israelite than Americans are genetically pure Englishmen!

To be sure, the motive for these myriads of people who became Jewish was not the best. The two edicts from the royal throne made it very apparent that there was about to be a time of struggle and bloodshed. The Jews would have the government's authority on their side (cf. 9:3). Most people would reason that the Jews would probably be victorious and they could be expected to take revenge upon all who had not been sympathetic to them. So many thought the most practical thing to do was to become Jewish.

We may learn the following lessons from this chapter:

1. Civil power may be used for good.
2. The Jews would not have been delivered if Esther and Mordecai had not used some ingenuity of their own in composing a counteracting edict.
3. Sometimes those expensive (royal stables) trappings of government, which seem so impractical, may be of very crucial usefulness.
4. The Lord does not always work miracles to protect the oppressed, sometimes he uses letters, languages, couriers, kings and queens and commoners.
5. Even pagan emperors and peoples recognize the need for the sanctity of human life against unwarranted and unjustified homicide.
6. Not all Jews today were born Jews — many may be descendants of proselytes.

CHAPTER EIGHT

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What did Esther receive when the king gave her "the house of Haman?"
2. Why did she give it to Mordecai?
3. What was the significance of the king giving the ring formerly belonging to Haman to Mordecai?
4. Why couldn't the king revoke the edict of Haman to kill the Jews?
5. What did the king suggest Esther and Mordecai do for the Jews?
6. What did Mordecai's proclamation allow the Jews to do?
7. When the Jews read Mordecai's proclamation what did they do?
8. What did many of the Gentiles in the Persian empire do when they learned of Mordecai's proclamation?