

# CHAPTER 9

We left two royal edicts in force, both given at the court of Shushan, one bearing date the thirteenth day of the first month, appointing that on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month then next ensuing all the Jews should be killed; another bearing date the twenty-third day of the third month, empowering the Jews, on the day appointed for their slaughter, to draw the sword in their own defence and make their part good against their enemies as well as they could. Great expectation there was, no doubt, of this day, and the issue of it. The Jews' cause was to be tried by battle and the day was fixed for the combat by authority. Their enemies resolved not to lose the advantages given them by the first edict, in hope to overpower them by numbers; the Jews relied on the goodness of their God and the justice of their cause, and resolved to make their utmost efforts against their enemies. The day comes at length; and here we are told,

**I.** What a glorious day it was, that year, to the Jews, and the two days following — a day of victory and triumph, both in the city Shushan and in all the rest of the king's provinces (v. 1-19).

**II.** What a memorable day it was made to posterity, by an annual feast, in commemoration of this great deliverance, called “the feast of Purim,” (v. 20-32).

## <BOOK> ESTHER 9:1-19

### THE JEWS AVENGED

We have here a decisive battle fought between the Jews and their enemies, in which the Jews were victorious. Neither side was surprised; for both had notice of it long enough before, so that it was a fair trial of skill between them. Nor could either side call the other *rebels*, for they were both supported by the royal authority.

**I.** The enemies of the Jews were the aggressors. They hoped, notwithstanding the latter edict, *to have power over them*, by virtue of the former (v. 1), and made assaults upon them accordingly; they formed

themselves into bodies, and joined in confederacy against them, to *seek their hurt*, v. 2. The Chaldee paraphrase says that none appeared against the Jews but Amalekites only, who were infatuated, and had their hearts hardened, as Pharaoh's against Israel, to take up arms to their own destruction. Some had such an inveterate implacable malice against the Jews that Haman's fall and Mordecai's advancement, instead of convincing them, did but exasperate them, and make them the more outrageous and resolute to cut all their throats. The sons of Haman, particularly, vowed to avenge their father's death, and pursue his designs, which they call *noble and brave*, whatever hazards they run; and a strong party they had formed both in Shushan and in the provinces in order hereunto. Fight they would, though they plainly saw Providence fight against them; and thus they were infatuated to their own destruction. If they would have sat still, and attempted nothing against the people of God, not a hair of their head would have fallen to the ground: but they cannot persuade themselves to do that; they must be meddling, though it prove to their own ruin, and roll a burdensome stone, which will return upon them.

**II.** But the Jews were the conquerors. That very day when the king's decree for their destruction was to be put in execution, and which the enemies thought would have been *their day*, proved *God's day*, <sup><49713></sup>Psalm 37:13. It was *turned to the contrary* of what was expected, and *the Jews had rule over those that hated them*, v. 1. We are here told,

**1.** What the Jews did for themselves (v. 2): *They gathered themselves together in their cities*, embodied, and stood upon their defence, offering violence to none, but bidding defiance to all. If they had not had an edict to warrant them, they durst not have done it, but, being so supported, they strove lawfully. Had they acted separately, each family apart, they would have been an easy prey to their enemies; but acting in concert, and gathering together in their cities, they strengthened one another, and durst face their enemies. *Vis unita fortior* — *forces act most powerfully when combined*. Those that write of the state of the Jews at this day give this as a reason why, though they are very numerous in many parts, and very rich, they are yet so despicable, because they are generally so selfish that they cannot incorporate, and, being under the curse of dispersion, they cannot unite, nor (as here) *gather together*, for, if they could, they might with their numbers and wealth threaten the most potent states.

2. What the rulers of the provinces did for them, under the influence of Mordecai. All the officers of the king, who, by the bloody edict, were ordered to help forward their destruction (<sup><TRID></sup>Esther 3:12, 13), conformed to the latter edict (which, being an estoppel against an estoppel, had set the matter at large, and left them at liberty to observe which they pleased) and *helped the Jews*, which turned the scale on their side, v. 3. The provinces would generally do as the rulers of the provinces inclined, and therefore their favouring the Jews would greatly further them. But why did they help them? Not because they had any kindness for them, but because *the fear of Mordecai fell upon them*, he having manifestly the countenance both of God and the king. They all saw it their interest to help Mordecai's friends because he was not only great in the king's house, and caressed by the courtiers (as many are who have no intrinsic worth to support their reputation), but *his fame* for wisdom and virtue *went out* thence *throughout all the provinces*: in all places he was extolled as a great man. He was looked upon also as a thriving man, and one that *waxed greater and greater* (v. 4), and therefore for fear of him all the king's officers helped the Jews. Great men may, by their influence, do a great deal of good; many that fear not God will stand in awe of them.

3. What God did for them: he struck *all people* with a *fear of them* (v. 2), as the Canaanites were made afraid of Israel (<sup><TRID></sup>Joshua 2:9, v. 1), so that, though they had so much hardiness as to assault them, yet they had not courage to prosecute the assault. Their hearts failed them when they came to engage, and *none of the men of might could find their hands*.

4. What execution they did hereupon: *No man could withstand them* (v. 2), but *they did what they would to those that hated them*, v. 5. So strangely were the Jews strengthened and animated, and their enemies weakened and dispirited, that none of those who had marked themselves for their destruction escaped, but they *smote them with the stroke of the sword*. Particularly,

(1.) On the thirteenth day of the month Adar they slew in the city Shushan 500 men (v. 6) and the ten sons of *Haman*, v. 10. The Jews, when on the feast of Purim they read this book of Esther, oblige themselves to read the names of Haman's ten sons all in one breath, without any pause, because they say that they were all killed together, and all gave up the ghost just in the same moment. — *Buxt. Synag. Jud.* c. 24. The Chaldee paraphrase

says that, when these ten were slain, Zeresh, with seventy more of his children, escaped, and afterwards begged their bread from door to door.

(2.) On the fourteenth day they slew in Shushan 300 more, who had escaped the sword on the former day of execution, v. 15. This Esther obtained leave of the king for them to do, for the greater terror of their enemies, and the utter crushing of that malignant party of men. The king had taken account of the numbers that were put to the sword the first day (v. 11), and told Esther (v. 12), and asked her what more she desired. "Nothing," says she, "but commission to do such another day's work." Esther surely was none of the blood-thirsty, none of those that delight in slaughter, but she had some very good reasons that moved her to make this request. She also desired that the dead bodies of Haman's ten sons might be hanged up on the gallows on which their father was hanged, for the greater disgrace of the family and terror of the party (v. 13), and it was done accordingly, v. 14. It is supposed that they were hanged in chains and left hanging for some time.

(3.) The Jews in the country kept to their orders, and slew no more of their enemies than what were slain the thirteenth day, which were in all, among all the provinces, 75,000, v. 16. If all these were Amalekites (as the Jews say), surely now it was that the remembrance of Amalek was *utterly put out*, <sup><1774></sup>Exodus 17:14. However, that which justifies them in the execution of so many is that they did it in their own just and necessary defence; they *stood for their lives*, authorized to do so by the law of self-preservation, as well as by the king's decree.

(4.) In these several executions it is taken notice of that on the prey they laid not their hand, v. 10, 15, 16. The king's commission had warranted them to *take the spoil of their enemies for a prey* (<sup><1781></sup>Esther 8:11), and a fair opportunity they had of enriching themselves with it; if Haman's party had prevailed, no doubt, they would have made use of their authority to seize the goods and estates of the Jews, <sup><1783></sup>Esther 3:13. But the Jews would not do so by them,

[1.] That they might, to the honour of their religion, evidence a holy and generous contempt of worldly wealth, in imitation of their father Abraham, who scorned to enrich himself with the spoils of Sodom.

[2.] That they might make it appear that they aimed at nothing but their own preservation, and used their interest at court for the saving of their lives, not for the raising of their estates.

[3.] Their commission empowered them to destroy the families of their enemies, even the *little ones* and *the women*, ~~<7081>~~ Esther 8:11. But their humanity forbade them to do that, though that was designed against them. They slew none but those they found in arms; and therefore they did not take the spoil, but left it to the women and little ones, whom they spared, for their subsistence; otherwise as good slay them as starve them, take away their lives as take away their livelihoods. Herein they acted with a consideration and compassion well worthy of imitation.

5. What a satisfaction they had in their deliverance. The Jews in the country cleared themselves of their enemies on the thirteenth day of the month, and they rested on the fourteenth day (v. 17), and made that a thanksgiving day, v. 19. The Jews in Shushan, the royal city, took two days for their military execution, so that they rested on the fifteenth day, and made that their thanksgiving-day, v. 18. Both of them celebrated their festival the very day after they had finished their work and gained their point. When we have received signal mercies from God we ought to be quick and speedy in making our thankful returns to him, while the mercy is fresh and the impressions of it are most sensible.

## ~~<7082>~~ ESTHER 9:20-32

### THE FEAST OF PURIM

We may well imagine how much affected Mordecai and Esther were with the triumphs of the Jews over their enemies, and how they saw the issue of that decisive day with a satisfaction proportionable to the care and concern with which they expected it. How were their hearts enlarged with joy in God and his salvation, and what new songs of praise were put into their mouths! But here we are told what course they took to spread the knowledge of it among their people, and to perpetuate the remembrance of it to posterity, for the honour of God and the encouragement of his people to trust in him at all times.

**I.** The history was written, and copies of it were dispersed among all the Jews in all the provinces of the empire, *both nigh and far*, v. 20. They all knew something of the story, being nearly concerned in it — were by the first edict made sensible of their danger and by the second of their deliverance; but how this amazing turn was given they could not tell. Mordecai therefore *wrote all these things*. And if this book be the same that he wrote, as many think it is, I cannot but observe what a difference there is between Mordecai's style and Nehemiah's. Nehemiah, at every turn, takes notice of divine Providence and the *good hand of his God* upon him, which is very proper to stir up devout affections in the minds of his readers; but Mordecai never so much as mentions the name of God in the whole story. Nehemiah wrote his book at Jerusalem, where religion was in fashion and an air of it appeared in men's common conversation; Mordecai wrote his at Shushan the palace, where policy reigned more than piety, and he wrote according to the genius of the place. Even those that have the root of the matter in them are apt to lose the savour of religion, and let their leaf wither, when they converse wholly with those that have little religion. Commend me to Nehemiah's way of writing; *that* I would imitate, and yet learn from Mordecai's that men may be truly devout though they do not abound in the shows and expressions of devotion, and therefore that we must not judge nor despise our brethren. But, because there is so little of the language of Canaan in this book, many think it was not written by Mordecai, but was an extract out of the journals of the kings of Persia, giving an account of the matter of fact, which the Jews themselves knew how to comment upon.

**II.** A festival was instituted, to be observed yearly from generation to generation by the Jews, in remembrance of this wonderful work which God wrought for them, that *the children who should be born* might know it, and *declare it to their children, that they might set their hope in God*, ~~47816~~ Psalm 78:6, 7. It would be for the honour of God as the protector of his people, and the honour of Israel as the care of Heaven, a confirmation of the fidelity of God's covenant, an invitation to strangers to come into the bonds of it, and an encouragement to God's own people cheerfully to depend upon his wisdom, power, and goodness, in the greatest straits. Posterity would reap the benefit of this deliverance, and therefore ought to celebrate the memorial of it. Now concerning this festival we are here told,

**1.** When it was observed — every year on *the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the twelfth month*, just a month before the passover, v. 21. Thus the first month and the last month of the year kept in remembrance the months that were past, even *the days when God preserved them*. They kept two days together as thanksgiving days, and did not think them too much to spend in praising God. Let us not be niggardly in our returns of praise to him who bestows his favours so liberally upon us. Observe, They did not keep the day when they fought, but the days when they rested, and on the fifteenth those in Shushan, and both those days they kept. The sabbath was appointed not on the day that God finished his work, but on the day that he *rested from it*. The modern Jews observe the thirteenth day, the day appointed for their destruction, as a fasting-day, grounding the practice on v. 31, *the matters of their fastings and cry*. But that refers to what was in the day of their distress (<sup><704B></sup>Esther 4:3, 16), which was not to be continued when God had turned their fasts into *joy and gladness*, <sup><3089></sup>Zechariah 8:19.

**2.** How it was called — *The feast of Purim* (v. 26), from *Pur*, a Persian word which signified *a lot*, because Haman had by lot determined this to be the time of the Jews' destruction, but the Lord, at whose disposal the lot is, had determined it to be the time of their triumph. The name of this festival would remind them of the sovereign dominion of the God of Israel, who served his own purposes by the foolish superstitions of the heathen, and outwitted the *monthly prognosticators* in their own craft (<sup><23713></sup>Isaiah 47:13), *frustrating the tokens of the liars and making the diviners mad*, <sup><23425></sup>Isaiah 44:25, 26.

**3.** By whom it was instituted and enacted. It was not a divine institution, and therefore it is not called a *holy day*, but a human appointment, by which it was made a *good day*, v. 19, 22.

**(1.)** The Jews ordained it, and took it upon themselves (v. 27), voluntarily *undertook to do as they had begun*. 5:23. They bound themselves to this by common consent.

**(2.)** Mordecai and Esther confirmed their resolve, that it might be the more binding on posterity, and might come well recommended by those great names. They *wrote*,

**[1.]** *With all authority* (v. 29), as well they might, Esther being queen and Mordecai prime-minister of state. It is well when those who are in authority use their authority to authorize that which is good.

[2.] *With words of peace and truth.*.. Though they wrote with authority, they wrote with tenderness, not imperious, not imposing, but in such language as the council at Jerusalem use in their decree (~~4152~~ Acts 15:29): “If you do so and so, *you shall do well. Fare you well.*” Such was the style of these letters, or such the salutation or valediction of them: *Peace and truth be with you.*

4. By whom it was to be observed — by *all the Jews*, and by *their seed*, and by all such as *joined themselves to them*, v. 27. The observance of this feast was to be both universal and perpetual; the proselytes must observe it, in token of their sincere affection to the Jewish nation and their having united interests with them. A concurrence in joys and praises is one branch of the communion of saints.

5. Why it was to be observed — that the memorial of the great things God had done for his church might never *perish from their seed*, v. 28. God does not work wonders for a day, but to be had in everlasting remembrance. *What he does shall be for ever*, and therefore should for ever be had in mind, ~~2184~~ Ecclesiastes 3:14. In this affair they would remember,

(1.) Haman's bad practices against the church, to his perpetual reproach (v. 24): *Because he had devised against the Jews to destroy them.* Let this be kept in mind, that God's people may never be secure, while they have such malicious enemies, on whom they ought to have a jealous eye. Their enemies aim at no less than their destruction; on God therefore let them depend for salvation.

(2.) Esther's good services to the church, to her immortal honour. When Esther, in peril of her life, *came before the king*, he repealed the edict, v. 25. This also must be remembered, that wherever this feast should be kept, and this history read in explication of it, this which she did might be *told for a memorial of her.* Good deeds done for the Israel of God ought to be remembered, for the encouragement of others to do the like. God will not forget them, and therefore we must not.

(3.) Their own prayers, and the answers given to them (v. 31): *The matters of their fastings and their cry.* The more cries we have offered up in our trouble, and the more prayers for deliverance, the more we are obliged to be thankful to God for deliverance. *Call upon me in the time of trouble*, and then *offer to God thanksgiving.*



6. How it was to be observed. And of this let us see,

(1.) What was here enjoined, which was very good, that they should make it,

[1.] A day of cheerfulness, *a day of feasting and joy* (v. 22), and *a feast was made for laughter*, <sup><109></sup>Ecclesiastes 10:19. When God gives us cause to rejoice why should we not express our joy?

[2.] A day of generosity, *sending portions one to another*, in token of their pleasantness and mutual respect, and their being knit by this and other public common dangers and deliverances so much the closer to each other in love. Friends have their goods in common.

[3.] A day of charity, sending *gifts to the poor*. It is not to our kinsmen and rich neighbours only that we are to send tokens, but to *the poor and the maimed*, <sup><142></sup>Luke 14:12, 13. Those that have received mercy must, in token of their gratitude, show mercy; and there never wants occasion, for the poor we have always with us. Thanksgiving and almsgiving should go together, that, when we are rejoicing and blessing God, the heart of the poor may rejoice with us and their loins may bless us.

(2.) What was added to this, which was much better. They always, at the feast, read the whole story over in the synagogue each day, and put up three prayers to God, in the first of which they praise God for counting them worthy to attend this divine service; in the second they thank him for the miraculous preservation of their ancestors; in the third they praise him that they have lived to observe another festival in memory of it. So bishop Patrick.

(3.) What it has since degenerated to, which is much worse. Their own writers acknowledge that this feast is commonly celebrated among them with gluttony, and drunkenness, and excess of riot. Their Talmud says expressly that, in the feast of Purim, a man should drink till he knows not the difference between *Cursed be Haman*, and *Blessed be Mordecai*. See what the corrupt and wicked nature of man often brings that to which was at first well intended: here is a religious feast turned into a carnival, a perfect revel, as wakes are among us. Nothing more purifies the heart and adorns religion than holy joy; nothing more pollutes the heart and reproaches religion than carnal mirth and sensual pleasure. *Corruptio optimi est pessima* — *What is best becomes when corrupted the worst.*