

CHAPTER 8

We left the plotter hanging, and are now to see what becomes of his plot.

I. His plot was to raise an estate for himself; and all his estate, being confiscated for treason, is given to Esther and Mordecai (v. 1, 2).

II. His plot was to ruin the Jews; and as to that,

1. Esther earnestly intercedes for the reversing of the edict against them (v. 3-6).

2. It is in effect done by another edict, here published, empowering the Jews to stand up in their own defence against their enemies (v. 7-14).

III. This occasions great joy to the Jews and all their friends (v. 15-17).

~~<7081>~~ ESTHER 8:1-2

ESTHER AND MORDECAI ENRICHED

It was but lately that we had Esther and Mordecai in tears and in fears, but fasting and praying; now let us see how to them there arose light in darkness. Here is,

1. Esther enriched. Haman was hanged as a traitor, therefore his estate was forfeited to the crown, and the king gave it all to Esther, in recompence for the fright that wicked man had put her into and the vexation he had created her, v. 1. His houses and lands, good sand chattels, and all the money he had heaped up which he was prime-minister of state (which, we may suppose, was no little), are given to Esther; they are all her own, added to the allowance she already had. Thus is *the wealth of the sinner laid up for the just*, and the *innocent divides the silver*, ~~<1132>~~Proverbs 13:22; ~~<18271>~~Job 27:17, 18. What Haman would have done mischief with Esther will do good with; and estates are to be valued as they are used.

2. Mordecai advanced. His pompous procession, this morning, through the streets of the city, was but a sudden flash or blaze of honour; but here we have the more durable and gainful preferments to which he was raised, which yet the other happily made way for.

(1.) He is now owned as the queen's cousin, which till now, though Esther had been four years queen, for aught that appears, the king did not know. So humble, so modest, a man was Mordecai, and so far from being ambitious of a place at court, that he concealed his relation to the queen and her obligations to him as her guardian, and never made use of her interest for any advantage of his own. Who but Mordecai could have taken so little notice of so great an honour? But now he was brought *before the king*, introduced, as we say, to kiss his hand; for now, at length, *Esther had told what he was to her*, not only near a-kin to her, but the best friend she had in the world, who took care of her when she was an orphan, and one whom she still respected as a father. Now the king finds himself, for his wife's sake, more obliged than he thought he had been to delight in doing honour to Mordecai. How great were the merits of that man to whom both king and queen did in effect owe their lives! Being brought before the king, to him no doubt he bowed, and did reverence, though he would not to Haman an Amalekite.

(2.) The king makes his lord privy-seal in the room of Haman. All the trust he had reposed in Haman, and all the power he had given him, are here transferred to Mordecai; for the ring which he had taken from Haman he gave to Mordecai, and made this trusty humble man as much his favourite, his confidant, and his agent, as ever that proud perfidious wretch was; a happy change he made of his bosom-friends, and so, no doubt, he and his people soon found it.

(3.) The queen makes him here steward, for the management of Haman's estate, and for getting and keeping possession of it: *She set Mordecai over the house of Haman*. See the vanity of laying up treasure upon earth; he that *heapeth up riches knoweth not who shall gather them* (⁴⁹¹⁶Psalm 39:6), not only *whether he shall be a wise man or a fool* (²¹⁰⁹Ecclesiastes 2:19), but whether he shall be a friend or an enemy. With what little pleasure, nay, with what constant vexation, would Haman have looked upon his estate if he could have foreseen that Mordecai, the man he hated above all men in the world, should have *rule over all that wherein he had laboured*, and thought that he showed himself wise! It is our interest,

therefore, to make sure those riches which will not be left behind, but will go with us to another world.

~~<TRB>~~ ESTHER 8:3-14

THE JEWS ENCOURAGED TO SELF-DEFENCE

Haman, the chief enemy of the Jews, was hanged, Mordecai and Esther, their chief friends, were sufficiently protected; but many others there were in the king's dominions that hated the Jews and desired their ruin, and to their rage and malice all the rest of that people lay exposed; for the edict against them was still in force, and, in pursuance of it, their enemies would on the day appointed fall upon them, and they would be deemed as rebels against the king and his government if they should offer to resist and take up arms in their own defence. For the preventing of this,

I. The queen here makes intercession with much affection and importunity. She came, a second time, uncalled into the king's presence (v. 3), and was as before encouraged to present her petition, by the king's holding out the golden sceptre to her, v. 4. Her petition is that the king, having put away Haman, would put away the mischief of Haman and his device against the Jews, that that might not take place now that he was taken off. Many a man's mischief survives him, and the wickedness he devised operates when he is gone. What men project and write may, after their death, be either very profitable or very pernicious. It was therefore requisite in this case that, for the defeating of Haman's plot, they should apply to the king for a further act of grace, that by another edict he would reverse the letters devised by Haman, and which he wrote (she does not say which the king *consented to and confirmed with his own seal*; she leaves it to his own conscience to say that), by which he took an effectual course to *destroy the Jews in all the king's provinces*, v. 5. If the king were indeed, as he seemed to be, troubled that such a decree was made, he could not do less than revoke it; for what is repentance, but undoing, to the utmost of our power, what we have done amiss?

1. This petition Esther presents with much affection: She *fell down at the king's feet and besought him with tears* (v. 3), every tear as precious as any of the pearls with which she was adorned. It was time to be earnest when the church of God lay at stake. Let none be so great as to be unwilling to

stoop, none so merry as to be unwilling to weep, when thereby they may do any service to God's church and people. Esther, though safe herself, fell down, and begged with tears for the deliverance of her people.

2. She expresses it with great submission, and a profound deference to the king and his wisdom and will (v. 5): *If it please the king and if I have found favour in his sight* — and again, “If the thing itself seem right and reasonable before the king, and if I that ask it *be pleasing in his eyes*, let the decree be reversed.” Even when we have the utmost reason and justice on our side, and have the clearest cause to plead, yet it becomes us to speak to our superiors with humility and modesty, and all possible expressions of respect, and not to talk like demandants when we are supplicants. There is nothing lost by decency and good breeding. As *soft answers turn away wrath*, so soft askings obtain favour.

3. She enforces her petition with a pathetic plea: “*For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come upon my people?* Little comfort can I have of my own life if I cannot prevail for theirs: as good share in the evil myself as see it come upon them; for *how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred*, that are dear to me?” Esther, a queen, owns her poor kindred, and speaks of them with a very tender concern. Now it was that she mingled her tears with her words, that *she wept and made supplication*; we read of no tears when she begged for her own life, but, now that she was sure of that, she wept for her people. Tears of pity and tenderness are the most Christ-like. Those that are truly concerned for the public would rather die in the last ditch than live to see the desolations of the church of God and the ruin of their country. Tender spirits cannot bear to think of the destruction of their people and kindred, and therefore dare not omit any opportunity of giving them relief.

II. The king here takes a course for the preventing of the mischief that Haman had designed.

1. The king knew, and informed the queen, that, according to the constitution of the Persian government, the former edict could not be revoked (v. 8): What is *written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring*, may not, under any pretence whatsoever, be reversed. This was a fundamental article of their *magna charta*, that no law or decree, when once it had passed the royal assent, could be repealed or recalled, no judgment vacated, no attainder reversed, ²⁷⁶⁵ Daniel 6:15. This is so far

from bespeaking the wisdom and honour of the Medes and Persians that really it bespeaks their pride and folly, and consequently their shame. It is ridiculous in itself for any man, or company of men, to pretend to such an infallibility of wisdom as to foresee all the consequences of what they decree; and therefore it is unjust, and injurious to mankind, to claim such a supremacy of power as to make their decrees irrevocable, whether the consequences prove good or bad. This savours of that old presumption which ruined us all: *We will be as gods*. Much more prudent is that proviso of our constitution, that no law can, by any words or sanctions whatsoever, be made unrepealable, any more than any estate unalienable. *Cujus est instruere, ejus est destruere* — *the right to enact implies the right to repeal*. It is God's prerogative not to repent, and to say what can never be altered or unsaid.

2. Yet he found an expedient to undo the devices of Haman, and defeat his design, by signing and publishing another decree to authorize the Jews to stand upon their defence, *vim vi repellere, et invasorem occidere* — *to oppose force to force, and destroy the assailant*. This would be their effectual security. The king shows them that he had done enough already to convince them that he had a concern for the Jewish nation, for he had ordered his favourite to be hanged *because he laid his hand upon the Jews* (v. 7), and he therefore would do the utmost he could to protect them; and he leaves it as fully with Esther and Mordecai to use his name and power for their deliverance as before he had left it with Haman to use his name and power for their destruction: “*Write for the Jews as it liketh you* (v. 8), saving only the honour of our constitution. Let the mischief be put away as effectually as may be without reversing the letters.” The secretaries of state were ordered to attend to draw up this edict on the twenty-third day of the third month (v. 9), about two months after the promulgation of the former, but nine months before the time set for its execution: it was to be drawn up and published in the respective languages of all the provinces. Shall the subjects of an earthly prince have his decrees in a language they understand? and shall God's oracles and laws be locked up from his servants in an unknown tongue? It was to be directed to the proper officers of every province, both to the justices of peace and to the deputy-lieutenants. It was to be carefully dispersed throughout all the king's dominions, and true copies sent by expresses to all the provinces. The purport of this decree was to commission the Jews, upon the day which

was appointed for their destruction, to draw together in a body for their own defence. And,

(1.) To stand for their life, that, whoever assaulted them, it might be at their peril.

(2.) They might not only act defensively, but might *destroy, and slay, and cause to perish, all the power of the people that would assault them, men, women, and children* (v. 11), and thus *to avenge themselves on their enemies* (v. 13), and, if they pleased, to enrich themselves by their enemies, for they were empowered to take the spoil of them for a prey. Now,

[1.] This showed his kindness to the Jews, and sufficiently provided for their safety; for he latter decree would be looked upon as a tacit revocation of the former, though not in expression. But,

[2.] It shows the absurdity of that branch of their constitution that none of the king's edicts might be repealed; for it laid the king here under a necessity of enacting a civil war in his own dominions, between the Jews and their enemies, so that both sides took up arms *by his authority, and yet against his authority*. No better could come of men's pretending to be wise above what is given them. Great expedition was used in dispersing this decree, the king himself being in pain lest it should come too late and any mischief should be done to the Jews by virtue of the former decree before the notice of this arrived. It was therefore *by the king's commandment*, as well as Mordecai's, that the messengers were *hastened and pressed on* (v. 14), and had swift beasts provided them, v. 10. It was not a time to trifle when so many lives were in danger.

~~785~~ ESTHER 8:15-17

THE JOY OF THE JEWS

It was but a few days ago that we had Mordecai in sackcloth and all the Jews in sorrow; but here is a blessed change, Mordecai in purple and all the Jews in joy. See ~~8815~~ Psalm 30:5, 11, 12.

1. Mordecai in purple, v. 15. Having obtained an order for the relief of all the Jews, he was easy, he parted with his mourning weeds, and put on the *royal apparel*, which either belonged to his place or which the king

appointed him as a favourite. His robes were rich, *blue and white, of fine linen and purple*; so was his coronet: it was *of gold*. These are things not worth taking notice of, but as they were marks of the king's favour, and *that* the fruit of God's favour to his church. It is well with a land when the ensigns of dignity are made the ornaments of serious piety. The *city Shushan* was sensible of its advantage in the preferment of Mordecai, and therefore *rejoiced and was glad*, not only pleased in general with the advancement of virtue, but promising itself, in particular, better times, now that so good a man was entrusted with power. Haman was hanged; *and, when the wicked perish, there is shouting*, ^{<3111>}Proverbs 11:10. Mordecai was preferred; and, *when the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice*.

2. The Jews in joy, v. 16, 17. The Jews, who awhile ago were under a dark cloud, dejected and disgraced, now had *light and gladness, joy and honour, a feast and a good lay*. If they had not been threatened and in distress they would not have had occasion for this extraordinary joy. Thus are God's people sometimes made *to sow in tears* that they may *reap in* so much the more *joy*. The suddenness and strangeness of the turn of affairs in their favour added much to their joy. They were *like those that dream; then was their mouth filled with laughter*, ^{<3001>}Psalms 126:1, 2. One good effect of this deliverance was that *many of the people of the land*, that were considerate, sober, and well inclined, became Jews, were proselyted to the Jewish religion, renounced idolatry, and worshipped the true God only. Haman thought to extirpate the Jews, but it proves, in the issue, that their numbers are greatly increased and many added to the church. Observe, *When the Jews had joy and gladness then many of the people of the land became Jews*. The holy cheerfulness of those that profess religion is a great ornament to their profession, and will invite and encourage others to be religious. The reason here given why so many became Jews at this time is because *the fear of the Jews fell upon them*. When they observed how wonderfully divine Providence had owned them and wrought for them in this critical juncture,

(1.) They thought them great, and considered those happy that were among them; and therefore they came over to them, as was foretold, ^{<3823>}Zechariah 8:23. *We will go with you, for we have heard, we have seen, that God is with you, the shield of your help, and the sword of your excellency*, ^{<1529>}Deuteronomy 33:29. When the church prospers, and is smiled upon, many will come into it that will be shy of it when it is in trouble.

(2.) They thought them formidable, and considered those miserable that were against them. They plainly saw in Haman's fate that, if any offered injury to the Jews, it was at their peril; and therefore, for their own security, they joined themselves to them. It is folly to think of contending with the God of Israel, and therefore it is wisdom to think of submitting to him.