



Esther - Chapters Nine and Ten

II Esther 3:1-9:17 - Main Action (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapters Nine and Ten

Finally the date for the Haman's edict came and the enemies of the Jews rose against them. However, the Jews were also supported by those in governance of the empire who feared the now powerful Mordecai and it was the Jews who prevailed, slaughtering seventy five thousand of their opponents but taking no plunder from them. The king gave Queen Esther permission for a second day of fighting in Susa to complete the destruction of the Jewish opponents.

Following the final victory there was a great celebration and Mordecai gave an instruction that the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar should be kept as a festival of remembrance in all the towns and villages throughout the empire. Because Haman had decided the original date by lot or Pur, this festival became known as Purim or lots. Orders to keep this festival year by year went out with the authority of the king and queen. Peace then came upon the land with Mordecai serving the king as next in rank, essentially his prime minister.

II.h Esther 9:1-17 - Destruction of the Enemies of the Jews

This is the climax of the story, where the tables are completely turned and the enemies of the Jews get what they apparently deserved for their opposition to and hatred of God's people.

¹ Now in the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, on the thirteenth day, when the king's command and edict were about to be executed, on the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain power over them, but which had been changed to a day when the Jews would gain power over their foes, ² the Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those

who had sought their ruin; and no one could withstand them, because the fear of them had fallen upon all peoples. ³ All the officials of the provinces, the satraps and the governors, and the royal officials were supporting the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai had fallen upon them. ⁴ For Mordecai was powerful in the king's house, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces as the man Mordecai grew more and more powerful. ⁵ So the Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword, slaughtering, and destroying them, and did as they pleased to those who hated them. ⁶ In the citadel of Susa the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred people. ⁷ They killed Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, ⁸ Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, ⁹ Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, Vaizatha, ¹⁰ the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews; but they did not touch the plunder.

Esther 9:1-10

On the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain power over them, no one could withstand them. The Jews definitely had their enemies, those who wished to destroy them. Yet they had someone great on their side: the king, with all his resources. With the king for them, it did not matter who was against them. Of course, it was not just the king and his officials who supported the Jews: <<What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us?>> (Romans 8:31).

The generation that went into captivity were promised prosperity in captivity providing they remained faithful to the Lord: <<Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare>> (Jeremiah 29:4-7). **God keeps his promises.**

The Jews did as they pleased to those who hated them. In context, this cannot mean that they cast off all restraint, but that they gave full vent to their understandable desire to destroy their attackers, as they were allowed to do; refer to the comment made on Esther 8:11.

They did not touch the plunder, which is repeated in vv.15-16. They were allowed to take plunder, but they did only what was necessary to defend themselves.

¹¹ That very day the number of those killed in the citadel of Susa was reported to the king. ¹² The king said to Queen Esther, ‘In the citadel of Susa the Jews have killed five hundred people and also the ten sons of Haman. What have they done in the rest of the king’s provinces? Now what is your petition? It shall be granted you. And what further is your request? It shall be fulfilled.’ ¹³ Esther said, ‘If it pleases the king, let the Jews who are in Susa be allowed tomorrow also to do according to this day’s edict, and let the ten sons of Haman be hanged on the gallows.’ ¹⁴ So the king commanded this to be done; a decree was issued in Susa, and the ten sons of Haman were hanged. ¹⁵ The Jews who were in Susa gathered also on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and they killed three hundred people in Susa; but they did not touch the plunder.

Esther 9:11-15

Let the Jews who are in Susa be allowed tomorrow also to do according to this day’s edict. This was probably because there were still armed men in Susa committed to carrying out the first edict. Many have criticised Esther for this, saying it showed a lack of love towards her enemies. Yet she displays the same principle found so often in Joshua - she would not settle for less than total victory.

The ten sons of Haman were hanged. In keeping with Persian royal practice, the king wipes out the conspirator’s family publicly to deter other would-be plotters against himself and the Jews.

By comparing Esther 3:1 and 1 Samuel 15:8-33, it can be determined that Haman and his sons were descendents of the ancient Amalekites. God commanded Saul, the son of Kish, to execute the full extent of God’s judgement against the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 15:2-3. Samuel failed; but this later descendent of the tribe of Benjamin and a son of Kish named Mordecai (Esther 2:5-6) completed God’s judgement against the Amalekites. Charles Spurgeon comments, “Now it was God’s intent that a last conflict should take place between Israel and Amalek: the conflict which began with Joshua in the desert was to be finished by Mordecai in the king’s palace.”

¹⁶ Now the other Jews who were in the king’s provinces also gathered to defend their lives, and gained relief from their enemies, and killed seventy-five thousand of those who hated them; but they laid no hands on the plunder. ¹⁷ This was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and on the fourteenth day they rested and made that a day of feasting and gladness.

Esther 9:16-17

Killed seventy-five thousand of those who hated them. Again, this is one of those accounts in history where a large number of people died. They did so because they followed a royal edict but there is also an indication that they were enemies of God's chosen people and therefore they were under God's curse: <<*I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*>> (Genesis 12:3). However, Christians should still have compassion for the fate of such people: <<*But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you*>> (Luke 6:27-28).

These verses, along with vv.18-19, explain why two different dates arose for celebrating the deliverance of the Jews. In rural areas the fighting was completed on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, so they celebrated on the fourteenth day. However, in Susa it did not finish until the fourteenth day, so they celebrated on the fifteenth day (v.18) – as they were still doing when Esther was written.

III Esther 9:18-10:3 - The Feast of Purim Inaugurated

The story ends by showing what came about as a result of the deliverance that the Jews experienced. These verses show how the spontaneous celebrations of vv.16-19 gave way to a properly organised, annual festival. After all the turmoil of the preceding chapters, the story at last arrives at a state of peace.

¹⁸ But the Jews who were in Susa gathered on the thirteenth day and on the fourteenth, and rested on the fifteenth day, making that a day of feasting and gladness. ¹⁹ Therefore the Jews of the villages, who live in the open towns, hold the fourteenth day of the month of Adar as a day for gladness and feasting, a holiday on which they send gifts of food to one another.

Esther 9:18-19

But the Jews who were in Susa rested on the fifteenth day, making that a day of feasting and gladness. As noted earlier, the fighting in the capital continued for a second day and so the festival was held on the third day. Thus Purim has two days of celebration.

²⁰ Mordecai recorded these things, and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, ²¹ enjoining them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same month, year by year, ²² as the days on which the Jews gained relief from their

enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor.²³ So the Jews adopted as a custom what they had begun to do, as Mordecai had written to them.

Esther 9:20-23

The fourteenth and also the fifteenth day of the same month were the days on which the rural and the urban Jews respectively had spontaneously begun to celebrate their deliverance. Mordecai avoids any difficulties this might cause by ordering that both days be observed.

Year by year. This was to be an annual festival. The principle of remembering God's great deliverance is good; people too often forget his great works.

Days for sending gifts of food. This would enable all alike to share in the feasting, including the poor: <<*Rejoice before the Lord your God – you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, the Levites resident in your towns, as well as the strangers, the orphans, and the widows who are among you – at the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name*>> (Deuteronomy 16:11), and: <<*Then he said to them, 'Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our Lord; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.'* So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, 'Be quiet, for this day is holy; do not be grieved.' And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them>> (Nehemiah 8:10-12); refer also to the comment made on Esther 2:18.

²⁴ Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur – that is, 'the lot' – to crush and destroy them;²⁵ but when Esther came before the king, he gave orders in writing that the wicked plot that he had devised against the Jews should come upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows.²⁶ Therefore these days are called Purim, from the word Pur. Thus because of all that was written in this letter, and of what they had faced in this matter, and of what had happened to them,²⁷ the Jews established and accepted as a custom for themselves and their descendants and all who joined them, that without fail they would continue to observe these two days every year, as it was written and at the time appointed.²⁸ These days should

be remembered and kept throughout every generation, in every family, province, and city; and these days of Purim should never fall into disuse among the Jews, nor should the commemoration of these days cease among their descendants.

Esther 9:24-28

Purim. This is now the Hebrew plural of Pur; refer to the comment made on Esther 3:7. Jews still keep the Festival of Purim today. It is one of the more popular Jewish celebrations, with costumes, games and noise.

²⁹ Queen Esther daughter of Abihail, along with the Jew Mordecai, gave full written authority, confirming this second letter about Purim.

³⁰ Letters were sent wishing peace and security to all the Jews, to the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus,

³¹ and giving orders that these days of Purim should be observed at their appointed seasons, as the Jew Mordecai and Queen Esther enjoined on the Jews, just as they had laid down for themselves and for their descendants regulations concerning their fasts and their lamentations. ³² The command of Queen Esther fixed these practices of Purim, and it was recorded in writing.

Esther 9:29-32

This second letter suggests that the differences between rural and urban Jews, referred to in vv.9-16, had persisted to some extent in spite of the first letter (vv.20-22). Both were distributed in the form of many letters, carried by many messengers but with the same basic content.

Letters were sent wishing peace and security to all the Jews. This is a conventional, formal opening for Jewish letters even today, but with added significance here. The intention of this letter was to bring peace between different Jewish communities by establishing the one true correct manner of observing the festival.

Concerning their fasts and their lamentations. The Jews were to take their obligation to observe the joyful Festival of Purim just as seriously as they had already accepted their obligation to observe days of fasting and weeping: *<<This shall be a statute to you for ever: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall deny yourselves, and shall do no work, neither the citizen nor the alien who resides among you. For on this day atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins you shall be clean before the Lord. It is a sabbath of complete rest to you, and you shall deny*

yourselves; it is a statute for ever>> (Leviticus 16:29-31), <<*Now the people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-melech and their men, to entreat the favour of the Lord, and to ask the priests of the house of the Lord of hosts and the prophets, 'Should I mourn and practise abstinence in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?'*>> (Zechariah 7:2-3), and: <<*Thus says the Lord of hosts: The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be seasons of joy and gladness, and cheerful festivals for the house of Judah: therefore love truth and peace*>> (Zechariah 8:19).

It is interesting that one of the most joyous of Jewish festivities is one that was instituted by people and not ordained by God. However, it is clear throughout the story that this could only have come about because of the blessing and protection of God on his people, and done in accordance with his will.

^{10.1} King Ahasuerus laid tribute on the land and on the islands of the sea. ² All the acts of his power and might, and the full account of the high honour of Mordecai, to which the king advanced him, are they not written in the annals of the kings of Media and Persia? ³ For Mordecai the Jew was next in rank to King Ahasuerus, and he was powerful among the Jews and popular with his many kindred, for he sought the good of his people and interceded for the welfare of all his descendants.

Esther 10:1-3

King Ahasuerus laid tribute on the land and on the islands of the sea. This imposed tax reversed the temporary remission of Esther 2:18. If the coastlands of the sea are remote parts of Ahasuerus' empire bordering the eastern Mediterranean, taxing them shows the impressive extent of his power.

Written in the annals of the kings. These were chronicles kept by officials of all the notable occurrences and achievements made during the reign of each king; refer also to the comment made on Esther 2:22-23.

Media and Persia were related Iranian peoples who had conspired together to overthrow the mighty Babylonian Empire. In 553 BC, Cyrus the Great, King of Persia, rebelled against his grandfather, the Median King, Astyages son of Cyaxares; he finally won a decisive victory in 550 BC resulting in Astyages' capture by his own dissatisfied nobles, who promptly turned him over to the triumphant Cyrus. After Cyrus' victory against Astyages, the Medes were subjected to their close kin, the Persians. Refer also to the comment made on Esther 1:2-3.

Next in rank to King Ahasuerus. Mordecai had thus risen to a position similar to that of Joseph under Pharaoh: <<*You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you*>> (Genesis 41:40).

For he sought the good of his people and interceded for the welfare of all his descendants. Under Mordecai as the king's chief officer, the Jews experienced exactly the opposite of what they had experienced under Haman.

The Book of Esther shows how the hand of God can move in a supernaturally-natural way. Again, Spurgeon comments, "It has been well said that the Book of Esther is a record of wonders without a miracle, and therefore, though equally revealing the glory of the Lord, it sets it forth in another fashion from that which is displayed in the overthrow of Pharaoh by miraculous power."