

Lesson 7 Commentary

Day 7: A Happy Ending

Esther 8–10

Mordecai and Esther Find Favor

When criminals like Haman were put to death in the Persian Empire, the king decided what would be done with their property. Ahasuerus gave Haman's estate to Queen Esther. He also made Mordecai one of his chief officers. Haman's power and prestige now belonged to Mordecai.

Yet the Jews still were not safe. Esther made another, strikingly different, desperate appeal to the king. Esther had called upon the dignity of her position to make her first request. Now she "fell at his feet and wept and pleaded with him." Ahasuerus held out the scepter to her, inviting her request. Esther begged the king to write an order overruling Haman's edict.

The king could not grant Esther's request. By law, any edict issued using the king's seal and name could not be revoked (see 1:19; Daniel 6:8, 12, 15). Ahasuerus removed himself from this bind by giving Mordecai the authority to issue a new order. The Jews would be allowed to destroy anyone who attacked them and to seize their property. They had eight months to prepare "to take vengeance on their enemies." The day was set for March 7, 473 BC, the same day Haman chose for the total destruction of the Jews (Esther 3:13).

Couriers delivered the new decree to the 127 provinces of the empire. Mordecai left the king and walked through Susa dressed in royal robes. "The city of Susa shouted and rejoiced" in response to the edict. It was a time of genuine gladness for the Jews far and near. In every city and province their mourning became rejoicing, their fasting changed to feasting. The incredible reversal resulted in many people converting to Judaism, as "fear of the Jews had fallen on them."

The Great Reversal

When the day finally arrived, the Jews successfully defended themselves. Some historians suggest there may have been 15 million Jews living among the 100 million people of the Persian Empire. The Jews were outnumbered. The situation seemed bleak. But God was in control. He saved His people.

In Susa the Jews killed 500 people and the 10 sons of Haman. When this was reported to Ahasuerus, he asked Esther what else she wanted. She asked for another day to carry out the edict. She may have known that not all of the Jewish enemies had been dealt with. The king agreed to her request, and 300 more men were killed in Susa. Also, the bodies of Haman's 10 sons were hung in public for all to see. In the Hebrew text, the names of these sons are traditionally printed in perpendicular type—in the shape of a gallows.

It is important to note that the Jews "laid no hands on the plunder." They did not seem interested in revenge, but only in basic self-defense. Apparently, people were willing to attack even though they knew the Jews could defend themselves. Throughout the provinces, the Jews defended themselves for only one day, killing about 75,000 people.



Think about power and privilege. When Esther first arrived at the palace, Mordecai cautioned her to hide her Jewish identity. Being Jewish became even more dangerous when Haman campaigned to destroy all the Jews in Persia. Without God's intervention, the Jews were powerless and would be destroyed.

Then Mordecai released a new decree. Suddenly the Jews were in a position of power and privilege, and non-Jews were afraid of them. Amazingly, however, the Jews used their new rights only in self-defense. Even though the decree permitted them to take their enemies' property, they did not. They acted in restraint.

Often privilege and power are abused. When the balance of power changes from one group to another, oppressed people sometimes become the oppressors. God warns His people against this repeatedly. He often told the Israelites to remember what it felt like to be mistreated in Egypt. He did not want them to oppress others as they had been oppressed.

The day after the Jews were delivered, they “rested and made it a day of feasting and joy.” Mordecai sent letters to the Jews throughout Persia. The 14th and 15th days of Adar would be days of celebration. Queen Esther also sent a letter to establish the feast of Purim for the Jews in Persia.

Since Haman had determined the day when he cast the “*Pur*,” or lot, the Jews called these days of celebration Purim (plural of the Hebrew word *pur*). Even today, Jews continue to observe the Feast of Purim. The 13th day of Adar (March 7, 473 BC) is observed as “Esther’s fast” before the joyous celebration of Purim on the 14th and 15th. Usually the scroll of Esther is read in its traditional chant. Purim is celebrated with feasting, rejoicing over God’s faithfulness, and sharing of gifts.

Mordecai Is Promoted

Mordecai is honored and promoted. We remember where he started—a lowly outcast caring for a young relative. But now the king has advanced him to second in rank to himself. He was “great among the Jews ... for he sought the welfare of his people and spoke peace to all his people.”



Think about living as a foreigner in a foreign land. Like Joseph and Daniel, Mordecai had been displaced from the home of his ancestors. However, even though he was an outsider, he did not give in to feelings of resignation and defeat. Instead, he worked for the good of those he lived among. He probably knew God’s command in Jeremiah 29:7: “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray ... on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” Mordecai had done this. God had seen to his welfare, to Esther’s welfare, and through them to the welfare of the Jews living in Persia.

In contrast to Haman who tried to promote himself, we remember 1 Peter 5:6: “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you.” God reversed the hardship, opposition, and humbling that Mordecai had experienced. At the right time, God positioned two unlikely people, Mordecai and Esther, to step into positions of extraordinary influence. In God’s plan they played key roles for His people. Truly, they had both come to positions of power for “such a time as this” (Esther 4:14).



Personalize the TRUTH!

God established many feasts and fasts to remember His work among the Israelites. For example, Passover, Pentecost, and the Day of Atonement are special observances God instituted. God did not command Purim and Hanukkah. Yet all were connected with God’s work among His people and their response to His goodness toward them.

Even today, Jews celebrate God’s work in and through the lives of Ruth and Esther during their yearly feasts. What deeds has God done for you? What could you do to notice, remember, and celebrate God’s work in your life? Consider keeping a journal of what He has done. Or make a “remembrance box” in which to keep mementos. Or even invite friends or family to a yearly feast to tell stories of what God has done in your lives this year. How could you more intentionally “remember the deeds of the LORD” (Psalm 77:11)?