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**C1313 – April 10, 2013 – Esther 8:1-17**  
**Mordecai's Exultation**

Turning to Esther 8 tonight, we have recently covered the pivotal chapters of the book, chapters 5, 6 and 7 which heighten the suspense to a climax. They span just two days during the reign of the Persian King Ahasuerus, also known as Xerxes, and Queen Esther, in the year 473BC when she put her life in the hands of the king and yet the king's mind is like channels of water and the LORD turns it wherever he wishes so that it is obvious that the LORD is working on behalf of Esther to protect her and use her as His means of deliverance of the entire Jewish population. In between the two days we find the hinge on which the book swings; Esther 6:1, the night the king could not sleep. Before that night the Persian administration's stance was against the Jews but after that night their favor turned toward the Jews.

Having seen the dramatic unfolding of those two nights, how Haman's desire to execute Mordecai was overturned and instead he was executed on the gallows, the rest of the book centers on the exaltation of Mordecai. However, even with Haman's demise there is one remaining vestige of Haman's rule that remains, the decree "to destroy, to kill and to annihilate every Jew, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month...and to seize their possessions as plunder." So that little issue is still on the table and has to be dealt with if the Jews are going to survive in history and God's plan be fulfilled.

We find it addressed in the closing scenes of the story, starting in Esther 8:1, **On that day**, the day Haman was impaled on the impaling stake **on that day King Ahasuerus gave the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews, to Queen Esther.** Now there's a turning of the tables here that we'll look at but the emphasis is on the fact that Haman was **the enemy of the Jews.** This fact of his enmity against the Jews sets the stage for the tables to

be turned. The categorizing of **Haman** as **the enemy of the Jews** is meant to trip off in our mind a recollection of the principle we are so oft to repeat here, Gen 12:3, *“And the one who curses you I will curse.”* However, the actual Hebrew text of Gen 12:3 does not use the word “curse” twice. It uses two different words but you can’t see that in the English because it just says curse. But literally it says *“And the one who disdains you I will curse.”* The Hebrew participle “disdains” means the person thinks the Jews are inferior to other people. At the root of all this is Satan stirring up the sin nature to hate the Jew because God loves the Jew and chose the Jew. So people down through history have hated the Jew and marked them out as inferior so that they can get a national policy of genocide against the Jew. This is the one God says I will curse. The Hebrew verb “curse” means to hem someone in such that there is no escape, to immobilize them, to render them impotent and that indeed is what God did with Haman. Haman we saw in Esther 3:6, disdained the Jews, when he found out Mordecai was a Jew and Mordecai wouldn’t bow down to him and pay homage he thought it a very little thing to only lay hands on Mordecai so he sought to lay hands on all the Jews by conspiring to kill all of them on one day. Now in response what God did was hem Haman in through a series of providential works such that Haman had no escape. That is what it means in Gen 12:3 when it says God will curse, He will hem you in by your circumstances so that there is no escape. But one thing remains, there are other anti-Semites in the kingdom who disdain the Jews and they can’t wait to get their grubby little hands on a Jew and strangle him, so God has some more hemming in to do in order to keep His promise in Gen 12:3.

But the first thing we find in verse 1 is that more than just hemming in Haman and making sure his demise, a series of divine ironies unfolds. Not only was Haman destroyed but verse 1, **the house of Haman** was given to **Queen Esther**. This refers to everything Haman owned because **house** could better be translated “estate”. So his entire estate was given to Esther which is strange because normally upon death the estate would go to his wife and ten sons. But apparently Haman forfeited that by the fact that he was a criminal so his property was confiscated by the state and given to Esther. So in a startling case of divine irony Haman who intended to plunder all the wealth of the Jews to refill his treasury, now was plundered by a Jewess.

Theologically speaking I would suggest that this turning of the tables on a small scale between one Gentile and one Jew is looking forward to a turning of the tables on a large scale in the end times when the Gentile nations who have plundered the Jews for centuries will be plundered and the Jews will come into all the world's riches in the kingdom. This is a pattern laid down multiple times in history. Earlier, when the Jews were slaves in Egypt for 400 years they went out on the night of the Passover with all the gold and silver and precious things of Egypt, this was a reversal of fortunes. The pattern is laid down in history that whenever the Jews are conspired against, held in slavery, crushed and oppressed, ultimately in the end they will be rescued and in the end times this same rescue and reversal of fortunes will occur. Ultimately, because of God's promise in Gen 12:3, the Jews will be at the top of the heap when the times of the Gentiles have run their course. People are responsible to see these patterns and respond.

Also in verse 1, **on that same day** the king found out the relationship between Mordecai and Esther. He did not know the connection before. Notice, **Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had disclosed what he was to her.** So for the first time she revealed that he was her cousin, this gives him access to the king. She also revealed **what he was to her**, that is, that he had raised her from a little girl as if she was "his own daughter" and therefore very special. Now upon coming into this information that Esther his Queen was related to Mordecai his savior, **the king** in verse 2, **took off his signet ring which he had taken away from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai.** This is another case of the tables being turned because the signet ring once given to **Haman** was now given **to Mordecai.** Everything that Haman had was now going to Esther and Mordecai, a dramatic turn of events.

Now the one wearing the king's **signet ring** was the one who had authority to act in the king's name. What had Haman used this authority for? To draw up the evil decree to exterminate all the Jews because of one Jew. What can we predict Mordecai will use this authority for? To draw up a good counter-decree to allow all the Jews to defend themselves against their aggressors.

And finally, at the end of verse 2, **Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.** Esther had received Haman's estate but she put Mordecai over the estate to manage its affairs. So now the Jews are really moving up in the

world, or we should say two Jews are moving up in the world. Esther is the Queen who has favor with the king, Mordecai has all the power and possessions of Haman but there are still hundreds of thousands of Jews in the Persian kingdom who are under the evil decree of Haman. What about them? God has rescued Mordecai but how will he rescue the rest of the Jews?

So verse 3, **Then Esther spoke again to the king, fell at his feet, wept and implored him to avert the evil scheme of Haman the Agagite and his plot which he had devised against the Jews.** Of course there was nothing the king could do to repeal the evil scheme. Persian kings did not have that kind of power. It reminds us of Darius the Mede who was conned into having a decree enacted that resulted in Daniel being thrown in the lion's den. Once Daniel was found guilty there was nothing he could do to stop his beloved Daniel from being cast into the den of hungry lions. It was standard legal practice in Media and Persia to not repeal a decree. Why? Because that would make it look like the king had made a mistake, his reputation was at stake. So they never repealed decrees.

Verse 3, in making this request **to avert the evil scheme**, you can tell that Esther did not assume that the king would do anything about it. She **fell at his feet, wept and begged him** to do something about it. And fortunately, in verse 4 **the king extended the golden scepter to Esther.** It was another moment where the mind of the king was like channels of water in the hand of the LORD and he turned it in Esther's favor. The **golden scepter** this time assures her that the king is favorable to her general request to do something **to avert the evil scheme. So Esther arose and stood before the king.**

Verse 5, **Then she said, "If it pleases the king and if I have found favor before him and the matter seems proper to the king and I am pleasing in his sight, let it be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the king's provinces.** You can see clearly she did not understand the laws of the Persians and the Medes. She wants him to simply revoke the previous letters. And what this shows is that the people who lived inside the royal palace lived a completely separate life from those outside the palace. They were clueless as far as the Persian government and its affairs were concerned. And we recall earlier when the

first decree went out from Haman that when the word hit the street Mordecai and all in the city of Susa knew, they were in confusion about such an apparently arbitrary decree to kill one people in the kingdom. But those in the palace didn't have a clue about the decree. Mordecai had to mourn in sackcloth and ashes just outside the king's gate in order to get the attention of those in the palace walls so that ultimately the information could get conveyed to Esther. So it's very interesting she makes this suggestion, just revoke the letters, and it shows the people in the royal palace lived in a fairy tale.

Now, regardless of the fact that her request cannot be granted, the basis of her request could be considered by the king to do something. She puts forth four requirements that she thinks are reasonable. First, **if it pleases the king**. If it doesn't please the king then the king should do nothing. But if it does then he should grant her request. Second, **if I have found favor before him**. Certainly this was a question in her mind before entering the king's inner court just two days before. Probably she is quite certain that she has found favor because the king had offered her up to half of his entire kingdom but she puts out the condition anyway. Third, **if...the matter seems proper to the king**. That is, if there is some benefit to keeping the Jews around then do something to avert their destruction. Surely if the Jews were making a positive contribution to the Persian kingdom then the king would find it in his best interests to keep them in his kingdom. Haman had argued just the opposite, that it was not in the best interests of the king to keep Jews in the kingdom because they opposed the king's laws. And fourth, **if...I am pleasing in the king's sight**. And this expression is difficult because the adjective **pleasing** has a very wide range of meaning. It could refer to anything from her physical beauty to her moral goodness. But whatever the case she posits that on the basis of these four conditions being met, the king revoke the letters of Haman.

Now the king could not do that. It would be simple but it would blemish the king. But nevertheless he could do something. You can see how distressed she is in verse 6, **For how can I endure to see the calamity which will befall my people, and how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?** Surely it would be a difficult thing to see one's entire people slaughtered. This would cause tremendous anguish. How could I **endure** it she asks?

Now we might point out that if nothing is done to avert this decree then every Jew in the world except Esther and Mordecai would have been destroyed on the thirteenth of Adar. And what this means is that ultimately the Messiah could never be born because the Messiah was to be of the tribe of Judah and that tribe would have been completely annihilated. Esther and Mordecai couldn't solve that problem because they were of the tribe of Benjamin. And yet God has promised to send His Messiah through the tribe of Judah. So this is really a crisis moment, a failure to do anything at this point would have thwarted the plan of God.

So, observing her in great distress the **King...said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, "Behold, I have given the house of Haman to Esther, and him they have hanged on the gallows because he had stretched out his hands against the Jews.** He's hinting that it seems logical that if I have treated one Jew hater in this manner and there are other Jew haters out there that something similar be done to them. So verse 8, **"Now you write to the Jews as you see fit, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's signet ring; for a decree which is written in the name of the king and sealed with the king's signet ring may not be revoked."** Now Esther learned a little lesson about Persian policy here, that these decrees can't just be revoked. But she also picks up on the fact then that whatever decree they write can't be revoked either. So who better to write the decree to protect the Jews than Jews themselves? And now is introduced a second kingdom-wide decree that would effectively overcome the first decree; the first decreed to destroy the Jews, the second will be written for Jews to defend themselves against their would-be destroyers.

Now looking at this purely from the point of view of a citizen of Persia, it must have been confusing to see such wildly contrasting decrees. What must be going on up in the oval office? Well, that's Gentile administrations. They are typically very unstable but because no one wants to look incompetent they're always trying to cover their tracks. But the fact is, after a while, most of them look incompetent to people who are paying attention. In the end most of them probably wouldn't do much better. There are tremendous pressures in Gentile kingdoms to succumb to and generally people in political administrations turn corrupt. In any case, we have two wildly contrasting

decrees that must have confused everyone and revealed the fickleness of the administration..

Verse 9 we have the bringing in of **the king's scribes...at that time**, the same group of scribes that were called the prior time, apparently it was their job to transcribe what was to be written. Now notice the timing, **in the third month (that is, the month Sivan), on the twenty-third day**; so we're talking two months and ten days after the first decree had gone out (cf Est 3:12). The first decree was sent out on the thirteenth of the first month and it decreed the annihilation of the Jews on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month. The second decree was sent out on the **twenty-third day of the third month**. So only two months in between but this gives about nine months before the scheduled day and this will give them an opportunity to enter into history responsibly and make choices that will effect their destiny. We mentioned earlier in this book that Esther and Mordecai were given an opportunity to enter into history and act in a real way that affects history and they recognized that moment and acted. Now all the Jews of the kingdom are being given nine months to think about these two decrees and decide how to act. And the obvious way to act is to form militias and train for combat. Otherwise you're not acting responsibly, you're acting irresponsibly, you're not responding to the circumstances properly. And the fact that this is given almost nine months before the day of their annihilation comes, I take it is providential circumstances inviting them to act properly and begin to form militias and train for combat.

So the **scribes** come in **and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded to the Jews, the satraps, the governors and the princes of the provinces which extended from India to Ethiopia, 127 provinces...**It was a massive kingdom. Persia was the largest empire ever in the history of the world to that time. In comparison to Babylon it was probably two to three times larger. Nothing had ever been seen like it since there was a nation on earth and every Jew on the planet lived inside this kingdom so you see how dire a situation this was since it would mean the annihilation of every Jew in the world. And since this is during the times of the Gentiles I take it that one of Satan's strategies is to use the four scheduled kingdoms outlined in the Book of Daniel to try and quarantine the Jews, isolate them inside one kingdom and then inspire a kingdom-wide decree to wipe out the Jews. That seems to be his strategy and it's a brilliant

strategy. Satan has learned that if he can move a strong-anti-Semite into an influential position in a kingdom then he can influence kingdom-wide anti-Semitism. We see that with Haman and I think we see that with Senator Hagel in the past few months. All it takes is to get one anti-Semite in a powerful governmental post and you can get a situation where action is taken against Israel. Am I saying that is going to happen with Senator Hagel? No. Am I saying it could? Yes. Apparently for decades there have been strong groups just under the State Department that have been arguing we need to back away from Israel because all it does is get us in trouble all over the world. And I would suggest these anti-Semitic strains have been high up in the US government at least as far back as the Carter administration. And we are the country that gave Israel security for the last 80-90 years, we are the country that first recognized the state of Israel in 1948 but I am telling you that departments in our government have been fomenting against Israel for at least thirty years and over time more and more of the general populace is turning against Israel and eventually America is going to turn its back against and ultimately America is going to decline. We are going to take a back seat among the nations. It could be a rapid decline due to military strike or it could be more gradual but America is going to decline. How soon nobody knows. But we do know. And I've just introduced three maneuvers Satan has used over and over to get to Israel. First, try to quarantine Jews in one location. Second, move anti-Semitic politicians into influential governmental posts. Third, influence the government to wipe them out.

You see both of these used in the Persian kingdom where all the Jews lived and with Haman second only to the king. Now in this case the Satanic plan was thwarted in verse 9 by this counter-decree. **Mordecai** had it drawn up and sent out, according to the end of the verse, to all **127 provinces, to every province according to its script, and to every people according to their language as well as to the Jews according to their script and their language.** Persia as a multi-lingual, multi-cultural kingdom and so these kingdom wide decrees had to go out in multiple languages. Apparently each province had its official **script** and historically it won't be until the time of Alexander the Great that the weaknesses of this system are remedied by the suggestion that everyone in the kingdom have an agreed upon language. That's important for the transmission of a culture and ultimately a shared culture is what is necessary to keep a kingdom intact. So the recognition of the key role of language will come up in later Gentile kingdoms. At this time,

though, they were still working with a multi-lingual and therefore multi-cultural society.

Verse 10, **He wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, and sealed it with the king's signet ring, and sent letters by couriers on horses, riding on steeds sired by the royal stud.** This is following the exact procedure of the first decree except this time the tables are turned, Haman is not writing the decree in the king's authority but Mordecai is, and the method of sending out the letters is the same, the pony express system (which Herodotus mentions as such an efficient system) - a remarkably fast transmission of information for an ancient society. The notice about the **couriers...riding on steeds sired by the royal stud** is to say they were the fastest horses over long distances in the entire kingdom. One courier would mount his steed and run from one post to the next post where another courier was waiting; the letters would be handed over and he'd be off to the next post and so forth and so forth. It was a marvelous system and basically our system of postal delivery operates off the same principles as we see here.

Now in verse 11 we find out what was in the letter and it follows closely the wording of the first decree, almost as if they were looking at it and formulating a decree that would be successful in overcoming it. **In them the king granted the Jews who were in each and every city the right to assemble and to defend their lives, to destroy, to kill and to annihilate the entire army of any people or province which might attack them, including children and women, and to plunder their spoil, 12on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (that is, the month Adar).** There are several things here that bother people so they object. The first objection is that Esther and Mordecai didn't show any mercy to their would-be attackers. If they had been fine Christian people they would have shown mercy. There are several responses to this objection. First, it confuses the nation Israel with the Church by reading Church ethics back into Israel's ethics. Esther and Mordecai were not members of Christ's Church. Christ's Church did not begin until the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 and we cannot expect them to follow ethics revealed later to those in the Church. So reading back a system of ethics that God revealed for the Church into the time of the nation Israel is a wrong way of reading Scripture. God has revealed a certain theocratic program for His nation Israel and He has revealed a certain distinct program

for His Church. We should never confuse the two.<sup>1</sup> We must read the Bible dispensationally, understanding that there is a progress of revelation down through the corridors of time. Second, Israel was given rules of holy war during the OT that commanded them to kill the men, the women, the children and all the animals. If this passage is unethical and must be tossed out then to be consistent many passages would also have to be tossed out. It is better to explain that God has a purpose for eliminating people groups in the post-Fall world. First of all, the Flood teaches us that no one deserves to live on the earth. Second, certain people groups become so corrupt that no one will believe and anyone who would believe God reaches with the gospel. Third, these people groups corrupt other people groups so terribly that God graciously removes them from the earth. Fourth, the removal of people groups from the earth reminds us that God is just and will ultimately judge the entire earth and remove evil forever. Fifth, some of these people groups become so anti-Semitic that they must be removed in order for God to protect His chosen people. Putting all of these reasons together we understand that it is not necessarily unethical for these things to be decreed or even for God to command them.

The second objection to verse 11 is that it is unethical to go on the unprovoked offense against a people. The answer to this is that the decree in v 11 is fundamentally a right to self-defense, not going on the offense. The text says in verse 11 that the decree would give them ***the right to assemble and to defend their lives*** against any **army or people...which might attack them**. However, once attacked the best defense is a tactical offense. I would suggest from the text that they prepared in advance in order to tactically defend themselves and had they not they would have been destroyed. Also we might point out that the decree was for just **one day...the thirteenth day of the twelfth month** so it was not an open ended decree to kill anti-Semites whenever or wherever they might find them.

A third reason people misunderstand this passage is because of a failure to understand the Abrahamic Covenant. Israel is the only nation God ever entered into a covenant with (Amos 3:2). In the covenant God wrote that anyone that disparages Israel will be cursed. So any anti-Semites, whether men, women or children in Persia, who attacked the Jews had it coming by virtue of the fact that God had warned them in the terms of the Abrahamic

Covenant not to turn against the Jews but rather to bless the Jews and they would be blessed.

The major objection is to the phrase at the end of verse 11 that the Jews could kill any **children and women** that might attack them. First, if this is the right rendering of the Hebrew text then it simply asserts the Jews right to self-defense against any attacker, even women and children that might attack them. Even in modern times many Arabs train their women and children to hate and attack the Jews whenever and wherever they find them. Women and children have historically carried out terror attacks against Jews. Are the Jews not to defend themselves against such women and children? Granted it is a horrible thing to have to kill a woman or a child but when a culture has become so corrupt that it trains women and children to be militant combatants, is it unethical to defend your life by killing them? I think not. Second, Robert Gordis has insisted that the verse is not rendered correctly in the English text. He suggests that the words “children and women” near the end of the verse are a citation of the earlier decree by Haman in chapter 3 and should be in quotes. The point he says is that the Jews could defend themselves, their wives and their children from any would-be attackers. This is a possible reading.

Verse 13, **A copy of the edict to be issued as law in each and every province was published to all the peoples, so that the Jews would be ready for this day to avenge themselves on their enemies.** Again, the purpose was so the Jews could prepare to defend themselves. I would say this requires them to assemble and learn basic tactics with the implements of war available to them. Verse 14, **The couriers, hastened and impelled by the king’s command, went out, riding on the royal steeds; and the decree was given out at the citadel in Susa. 15Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal robes of blue and white,** it should read “violet and white.” Violet and white were the national colors of Persia; it would be like us wearing red, white and blue. So Mordecai went out into the streets of Susa wearing the national colors of Persia **with a large crown of gold,** actually it should read “turban,” a large turban of gold, **and a garment of fine linen and purple;** he was decked out in the national colors of Persia. **and the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced.** God had raised up a hero for Israel and placed him strategically in the Persian government where he could work on their behalf as Daniel had done in Babylon. And finally,

contrary to the first decree where all Susa was in confusion the whole city **shouted and rejoiced**, another turn of events.

Verse 16, **For the Jews there was light and gladness and joy and honor. Light** in this context refers to “prosperity” and “well-being.” The Jews continued to prosper and enjoy a sense of well-being in the Persian kingdom. Verse 17, **In each and every province and in each and every city, wherever the king’s commandment and his decree arrived, there was gladness and joy for the Jews, a feast and a holiday.** This holiday is not the same as Purim, the one established in Esther 9 nine months later, but it is the forerunner of it. As each city received news of the decree they had a religious feast and holiday to celebrate the terms of the new decree.

And finally, at the end of verse 17, **And many among the peoples of the land became Jews, for the dread of the Jews had fallen on them.** Now doesn’t this dismantle the dispensational position that a Gentile cannot become a Jew? No, the Hebrew for **became Jews** is *yahad<sup>ii</sup>* and means they became religious Jews, proselytes to Judaism. **Many** Gentiles throughout **the land** converted to the religion of Judaism and left the religion of Zoroastrianism which was popular throughout the Persian kingdom. But it does not mean that they became physical Jews. One can only be a physical Jew if he is physically descended from Jacob. But one can convert to Judaism and become either a proselyte to Judaism or what is known as a Gentile God-fearer. This expression refers to those who became proselytes to Judaism. This is the closest a Gentile could become to Judaism. It required that the person undergo circumcision and promise to keep the Torah. God-fearers were on the fringes of Judaism, they did not have to undergo circumcision and so they were not as close to Judaism and were kept at a distance. But what is described here is a number of Gentiles throughout the land becoming proselytes to Judaism because **the dread of the Jews had fallen on them.** That’s an interesting reason. They recognized that the God of the Jews was working on behalf of the Jews throughout the entire kingdom of Persia. This meant that He was sovereign over all nations and therefore the only true God. Therefore the best thing to do was to align themselves with the one true God of Israel. And so God’s work on behalf of the Jews through Esther and Mordecai turned many Gentiles toward the one true God and away from idols. Once again this example on a small scale of what happens when God

providentially works on behalf of His chosen people looks forward to end times when on a grand scale God will work on behalf of His people and many nations will turn to the Lord.

Alright, what can we take away from this passage? Two things in the main. First, God will ultimately turn the tables in favor of the Jews. He did this on an individual level with Esther and Mordecai, giving Haman's possessions and power to them. He will do this on a national level with the whole nation Israel, giving Gentile possession and power to them in the kingdom. Second, one of Satan's strategies is to quarantine Jews in a nation, install anti-Semites in leadership positions of those nations and influence those nations to annihilate the Jews. This occurred in Persia, it occurred in Nazi Germany and it will occur again in the future. Third, when this quarantine occurs and the nations come against Israel then the conditions of Gen 12:3 are met and God will hem these nations in leaving them no room to escape and they will come to destruction. Fourth, when it becomes apparent that God is working on behalf of Israel then many within these nations will turn to the LORD and be saved.

Alright, next week we'll see how the Jews fared after they responsibly formed their militias and trained for combat.

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<sup>i</sup> It is not true that the OT is the NT concealed

<sup>ii</sup> This is the only usage of this word in the Hebrew Bible.

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