

IX. Epilogue (10:1-3)

The writer closes out his narrative with a short commentary that serves as a capstone to the book. Notably, he makes no direct reference to the events recounted in the preceding nine chapters, but summarizes them indirectly by focusing on Mordecai and his legacy.

A. Mordecai's Tribute

1. Though Mordecai is the subject of the epilogue, the author introduces it by noting a few particulars about King Ahasuerus and his reign (10:1-2a). Thus he ends his story in the same way he began it (ref. 1:1). But closer examination shows that he did so, not because he was concerned with the Medo-Persian king per se, but in order to more effectively punctuate the greatness of Mordecai.
2. Ahasuerus ruled over a vast empire of 127 provinces extending from India to Ethiopia, and the authority and strength of his dominion were such that he was able to exact tribute payments from even the most distant and remote of his holdings. Ahasuerus was a great king, and consistent with Middle Eastern practice at that time, his exploits and accomplishments were recorded as a permanent legacy in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia (10:2b).
3. Such was Ahasuerus' personal and royal greatness, and, given the thrust of the narrative, it may at first seem strange that the writer concludes the book by highlighting it. For, subsequent to his introduction in the first chapter, Ahasuerus plays a minor role in the story. He is not developed as a character, and is only mentioned as needed to advance the storyline to its final outcome. But as indicated above, the writer turned his attention to the king for the purpose of better testifying to Mordecai's greatness and glory.

Thus he notes that, just as Ahasuerus' exploits were recorded in the Medo-Persian Chronicles, so were Mordecai's. This fact has immense significance, for such historical records were designed to provide witness to later generations of the greatness of the kingdom they chronicled. For this reason they focused on the various kings and the particulars of their reigns (cf. 1 Kings 11:41, 14:29, 15:7, 23, 31, etc.). That Ahasuerus' rule would be documented in the Medo-Persian national records is fully expected; that the greatness and accomplishments of Mordecai – a *Jew* whose people and nation were subjugated to the authority and power of Medo-Persia – would be recorded alongside those of Ahasuerus is nothing less than astounding.

4. Having asserted Mordecai's greatness in verse 2, the writer closes out his narrative with a brief description of it (10:3). His summary serves to justify the incredible honor bestowed upon Mordecai of being memorialized in the Medo-Persian Chronicles.
 - a. First of all, he notes that Mordecai was second only to the king in his authority and power. But this is insufficient in itself to warrant such a memorial; position alone doesn't merit being mentioned in records of this type. Mordecai was included in the Book because of his contribution to Ahasuerus' reign.

b. The writer points to this truth by emphasizing that Mordecai's remarkable distinction resulted, not from the title given to him, but the way in which he exercised his authority. In marked contrast to Haman, whose consuming self-interest earned him only pretended honor compelled by the command of the king (ref. 3:1-2), Mordecai was honored and revered because he labored for the good of those under his authority; he "*sought good for his people*" and "*spoke peace to all his seed*" – that is, to all who, with him, were the seed of Abraham.

1) This description puts the emphasis where it belongs, namely on Mordecai's concern and intercession for his people. In their hour of desperation, he, together with Esther, emerged as their advocate and agent of deliverance and triumph. In this way Mordecai is presented as another *Joseph* figure:

- a descendent of Abraham who comes forth from obscurity and ignominy to attain authority over a Gentile empire;
- a man who, by the unseen hand of divine providence, is prepared to fulfill his appointed role as savior of Abraham's covenant seed;
- a man whose purpose on the stage of salvation-history was to serve as God's agent for conquering the forces that threatened death and destruction, thereby granting life out of certain death to the people who are called by His name.

And as another Joseph, Mordecai more importantly serves as another type of the Messiah Himself. In Mordecai God provides another glimpse into the person, purpose, and work of the One who was yet to come.

2) At the same time, the fact that he was memorialized in the Chronicles of the Medes and Persians implies that Mordecai's role as servant-ruler reached beyond the Jews to all the subjects of Ahasuerus' dominion. Certainly he would never have earned a place in the Book alongside the king himself unless his service as prime minister benefited the Medo-Persian kingdom as a whole. Not only the Jewish nation, but all the peoples of the vast empire recognized and lauded Mordecai's greatness. In this, too, he prefigures the One who would speak peace, not only to the physical seed of Abraham, but to all the Gentile nations of the earth:

"Rejoice heartily, O daughter of Zion, shout for joy, O daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king shall come to you; a just savior is he, meek, and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. He shall banish the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem; the warrior's bow shall be banished, and he shall proclaim peace to the nations. His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth." (Zechariah 9:9-10)

B. Summary Considerations

By juxtaposing Mordecai and Ahasuerus at the conclusion of his narrative, the writer affords to Mordecai the highest possible status and glory. But his testimony to Mordecai's greatness more importantly serves to spotlight the turn of the lot that lies at the heart of the story.

1. As with the One whom he prefigured, Mordecai's exaltation came in the context of the greatest possible opposition. The lot had been cast against him and his countrymen, and, to all appearances, his own fate – and therefore theirs – had been sealed.
2. Moreover, he had every reason to believe that the God of Israel had forsaken His people. Centuries of callous infidelity and perpetual rejection of divine overtures of mercy had left the Jews in exile with David's kingdom in ruins and his throne cast to the ground. Hadn't God warned from the beginning that infidelity to the covenant would bring such destruction, desolation, and exile (cf. Deuteronomy 28:1-69; Joshua 23:1-16)? And now that these things had deservedly come up them, what possible hope could they have that God would remember His mercy, relent from His anger, and return to deliver them?
3. Nevertheless, in their hour of desperation the covenant people had humbled themselves before their God and cried out to Him. And the unseen, seemingly absent Lord of the covenant heard them and came to their rescue. He laid hold of the lot that had promised their annihilation and turned its prediction back upon the head of the one who had cast it (9:24-25). Not Haman's lot, but Yahweh's lot would determine the fate of His people.

In this way, the book of Esther reveals that the story isn't the story: *What transpires in the realm of the natural and temporal – the realm defined by what is seen – serves the goal of and speaks to an ultimate purpose and overarching reality that are unseen.*

This means that no one – not even a child of God – is capable of discerning the true significance of circumstances and events that meet him in this life. God's people must look beyond what is seen and discipline themselves to not judge and respond with natural wisdom. They must rest in their Father's stated purpose and end; it is those things and His promise regarding them that give meaning to the vicissitudes of life under the sun.

In the end, the story of Esther is a powerful witness to the God who “keeps covenant,” and so also a call to His people to live accordingly. The Hebrew sons of the covenant were obligated to trust God's promise, veracity, and power rather than their perilous and hopeless circumstance. Everything that met their eyes certified to them that their destruction was assured, but by their fasting and petition they showed their trust in the God whose “sovereignty rules over all.”

The Jews cried out to their Redeemer, knowing that He was fully capable of delivering them and hoping against hope that He would remember His mercy and the oath He swore to Abraham – the oath that had long ago brought deliverance to their forefathers and established their identity as Yahweh's chosen people until the Seed should come. And deliver He did, not because of their pitiful cries, but because of His own faithfulness; and then not through a spectacular display of supernatural power, but through the invisible and unobtrusive hand of natural providence.

4. Though not a part of the inspired text, the poetic commentary appended to the book of Esther by the Jewish authors of the Septuagint provides a marvelous postscript to it. It picks up where the Hebrew text leaves off, and is constructed upon the premise of a dream Mordecai experienced and his interpretation of it:

“The Jew Mordecai was next in rank to King Ahasuerus, in high standing among the Jews, and was regarded with favor by his many brethren, as the promoter of his people's welfare and the herald of peace for his whole race. Then Mordecai said:

‘This is the work of God. I recall the dream I had about these very things, and not a single detail has been left unfulfilled – the tiny spring that grew into a river, the light of the sun, the many waters. The river is Esther, whom the king married and made queen. The two dragons are myself and Haman. The nations are those who assembled to destroy the name of the Jews, but my people is Israel, who cried to God and was saved. Yahweh saved His people and delivered us from all these evils.’

‘God worked signs and great wonders, such as have not occurred among the nations. For this purpose He arranged two lots: one for the people of God, the second for all the other nations. These two lots were fulfilled in the hour, the time, and the day of judgment before God and among all the nations. God remembered His people and rendered justice to His inheritance. Gathering together with joy and happiness before God, they shall celebrate these days on the fourteenth and fifteenth of the month Adar throughout all future generations of His people Israel.’”

One day, this same mercy and covenant faithfulness – here manifested in glorious fashion to the physical seed of Abraham – would be celebrated again, this time because of the triumph that the Purim victory only portrayed. In that day God’s full and final deliverance would be realized for the sum of Abraham’s children:

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant – as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old – salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us; to show mercy toward our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to Abraham our father, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days. And you, John, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways; to give to His people the knowledge of salvation that is in the forgiveness of their sins, by virtue of the tender mercy of our God, with which the Sunrise from on high shall visit us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Luke 1:68-79)

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