

4. In recounting the process of the Jews' deliverance, the writer began by taking note of the Jewish and Gentile response provoked by Mordecai's counter-decree (8:16-17). From there he chronicled the actual conflict and its triumphal outcome (9:1-16). Lastly, the writer relates how the Jews' victory was made a matter of perpetual national commemoration by the establishment of the festival of Purim (9:17-32).

- a. In one day – the day determined by Haman's lot – the Jews killed 75,000 “*of those who hated them; but they did not lay their hands on the plunder*” (9:16). This is now the third time the author has provided this qualification, and this summary statement once again emphasizes the defensive and righteous nature of the Jewish resistance. In taking up arms they sought only to defend themselves and their families against those who desired their death. Unlike their adversaries, they were not motivated by either hatred or the prospect of material gain.

In Susa, the resistance continued for a second day according to Esther's petition. Five hundred men were slain on the first day and three hundred more on the second (9:6, 15). Most importantly, the completion of the Jewish triumph was attested by the public display of the dead bodies of Haman's ten sons on the second day. Haman was the author of the conflict, his decree having created enemies for the Jews – enemies authorized to pursue their annihilation. With the death of his sons, Haman's presence and influence were brought to an end, thus ending the enmity against the Jews.

God's covenant people had not only escaped destruction, they had prevailed over their adversaries with an overwhelming and absolute triumph. Those who sought their lives were not simply defeated in battle; they were no more. Not unexpectedly, the Jewish reaction across the empire was exultation and great celebration. The Jews outside of Susa celebrated on the fourteenth of Adar while their brethren in Susa continued the fight. For their part, the latter Jews observed their own day of feasting and celebration on the fifteenth of the month (9:17-19).

- b. Such a monumental victory deserved more than simply the reactive rejoicing of those two days; it deserved permanent recognition and celebration in the form of an official commemoration. And so it was that, immediately following the Jews' triumph, Mordecai set about establishing the festival of *Purim* as a national holiday to be celebrated from that time forward (9:20-28).

- 1) Months earlier Mordecai had written to the Jews of Medo-Persia authorizing them to resist the attacks of their enemies. Now he was writing again, this time to provide uniform witness to the events surrounding their great national victory. He wanted all his countrymen throughout the empire to know what had transpired in those two days, but more than that, he wanted them all to share in one another's exultation. The majority entered their rest and celebration on the fourteenth of Adar, while the Jews in the capital city enjoyed theirs on the following day. Accordingly, Mordecai appointed both days to comprise an official Jewish holiday.

As the Jews had gained a national victory, they were to observe a holiday of national commemoration. They had triumphed in solidarity as God's covenant people, and they were to celebrate in the same way. No time of autonomous exultation, Mordecai specified in his letters that this celebration was to be focused on community and mutual concern. The Jews' feasting and rejoicing were to include all the children of Israel, and this would be accomplished by their exchanging food gifts with one another, even being careful to provide such gifts to the poor among them.

The month of Adar had been long dreaded as a time of destruction and mourning, but its coming had brought deliverance and triumph beyond anyone's wildest dream. Therefore this entire month was to be a month of great delight – a month having its focus in the appointed festivities of the fourteenth and fifteenth days (9:22).

- 2) When they received Mordecai's letters the Jews "*undertook what they had started to do*" (9:23). That is to say, they happily agreed to comply with the instruction in his letter. The Jews in every community throughout the kingdom had spontaneously celebrated their own local victory over their attackers; so they would now make their celebration a matter of annual, national observance. What each one had done at the beginning he would now undertake as a commemoration in solidarity with all his brethren.
- 3) The writer provides his own commentary on this arrangement by observing, in summary review, the reason for the Jews' happy compliance. All the Jews of Medo-Persia rejoiced in Mordecai's directive because they understood the significance of what it established (9:24-28).

Haman – the avowed enemy of all the Jewish people – had secretly plotted their destruction, and toward that end he had left nothing to chance. Though his personal power and influence in the kingdom were unrivaled, Haman had not been content to entrust the outcome of his scheme to those things alone. In order to ensure that his plan wouldn't fail, he had secured the insight and blessing of the lot. Haman had "*cast Pur,*" and the lot had assured him that his intention would succeed if he executed his plan of destruction on the day it identified (ref. again 3:7).

Having looked through the eyes of the lot, Haman rejoiced in his triumph as if it were already in hand. He had seen the future, and the future was his. But other forces were at work – forces unseen and unnamed, and the providential interweaving of numerous independent circumstances and events would secure a different outcome. Haman's wicked scheme "*which he had devised against the Jews*" was "*returned on his own head*" (9:25). As prophesied by his wife and friends, the lot had turned against him, and the writer highlights this reversal by restating its epitomizing event: Haman and his sons were hanged on the gallows in the place of Mordecai.

Haman had placed his confidence in the predictive insight of the lot, unable to see that this human “pur” was subject to another power that cast its own lot. Haman’s pur had no power over the future, and for this reason its insight was useless. Because it couldn’t *secure* the future, it had no capacity to accurately *predict* it. It was a false lot; the true lot was in the hand of another, and thus the holiday commemorating the Jews’ triumph was aptly named *Purim* – “lots” (9:23-25).

As had been the case so many times throughout their history, the Jewish people experienced a great victory over their enemies. And even though it had come through apparently natural circumstances apart from miraculous intervention, they knew it was from the hand of their covenant God.

- The Jews had sought God’s intervening mercy with fasting and petition when they first learned of Haman’s decree against them (ref. 4:1-3); why, then, wouldn’t they attribute their triumphal deliverance to Him?
- And though Israel’s national history contained numerous examples of God’s supernatural activity on behalf of His people, the Jews clearly recognized that their ongoing preservation and well-being resulted primarily from divine superintendence of natural, everyday circumstances.
- Furthermore, was it really possible to explain so many strange twists in providence and ironic outcomes apart from God’s overseeing presence?

The day appointed for the Jews’ destruction had proven to be a day in which God’s covenant faithfulness to them was again powerfully affirmed, and it was fitting that such a glorious day should be memorialized among all the Jews in every place throughout all their generations (9:26-28). The Glory of Israel had demonstrated once more that He is not a man that He should lie or change His mind; His lovingkindness is everlasting and His faithfulness to all generations. Mordecai – and the Jews in solidarity with him – instituted Purim not to commemorate their own victory as such, but to celebrate their God who remains ever committed to the oath He swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

- c. After issuing his letters instituting Purim, Mordecai, together with Esther, composed a second formal correspondence regarding this festival (9:29-31). The writer makes three observations about this second letter:

The first observation pertains to its significance and authority. He states that Esther – ostensibly acting in her role as queen – came alongside Mordecai in order to attach her royal authority to his letter and the directives it contained. The author further emphasizes the authoritative and binding nature of this letter by referring to it as Esther’s *command* (9:32). In conjunction with its predecessor, this second letter served to establish the days of Purim as a binding, perpetual obligation on the sons of Israel: Mordecai and Esther established it by decree; the Jews established (confirmed) it by their eager compliance (9:31).

The second pertains to the character of the letter, namely the fact that it was composed of “*words of peace and truth*” (9:30). Because the writer adds nothing more to this statement, his meaning must be determined by considering his terms within the present context.

- The Hebrew noun rendered *peace* doesn’t indicate simply the absence or cessation of conflict; it denotes wholeness and well-being associated with a state of blessedness. In the broadest sense, “shalom” speaks of the condition in which all things are as they ought to be – free of anomaly, corruption, and antipathy. Such perfection and harmony are the essence of blessedness which, in turn, produces a sense of authentic well-being.
- For its part, the concept of *truth* goes far beyond sterile factuality – merely the accurate representation of facts. This term identifies a key biblical virtue that speaks of the absence of all falsehood in every form and manifestation. At its heart are the ideas of firmness and certainty, and so it embraces the concepts of integrity, faithfulness, and constancy. Not surprisingly, it has God and His ways and works as its primary referents.

In context, the phrase “words of peace and truth” refers to the content of the letter, which served as a kind of addendum to its predecessor. The writer notes that it contained further instructions for observing Purim, and so would have also explained the reasons for them. *This second edict reaffirming and broadening the observance of Purim spoke of peace and truth in that it called the Jews to forever commemorate their blessed estate as the covenant seed, and so celebrate the God who is true; the God who never forgets or deviates from His word of promise.*

The third remark pertains to the specific purpose for the letter, which was to establish “*times of fasting and their lamentations*” in connection with the observance of Purim (9:31). This addition is notable given the overall tenor of the holiday. Purim was being instituted to perpetuate the exultation and rejoicing that had erupted on the occasion of the Jews’ victory; what place did fasting and lamentation have in such a celebration? The answer ought to be obvious: *Mordecai’s second letter called for fasting and lamentation because these things were as much a part of Purim as was celebration.*

Here again the writer ingeniously incites the readers’ sense of God while yet refraining from mentioning Him. The great triumph commemorated by Purim was conceived in the womb of helpless woe. That is to say, it originated with dark days of fasting and lamentation, and what was the purpose for that activity except to humbly plead for the intervention of the God of Israel? By requiring these things as part of the Purim festival Mordecai and Esther were insuring that their countrymen would never forget where their deliverance had come from.

- d. Thus the account of the Jews’ victory aptly ends with the Purim edicts being recorded for all time. The triumph was absolute; so was to be its commemoration.