

A Celebration to Remember

- Esther 8
- What a turn of events! Last week we rejoiced when the justice of God was given out to the wicked and unrepentant Haman, who had plotted to destroy the Jews. We saw that what Haman had planned for others was given to him instead, as Solomon said, “He who digs a pit will fall into it.” Haman prepared a gallows for Mordecai, and Haman ended up being the one hanged on it. Now what to do with his house and estate, since he wouldn’t need it any more? We know that in Persian culture the property of a condemned man would become the property of the king, but he gives the house of Haman to Esther, who promptly gives it to Mordecai. Haman wouldn’t need the signet ring of the king any more, so that ALSO goes to Mordecai, signifying that he would take the place of Haman as the Prime Minister of the land. As a final coup de grace, at the end of the chapter we see Mordecai dressed in all the royal regalia, just as he was on the day that Haman had to parade him through the streets. That parade had been a one-time event, but now it is permanent. It reminded me of what Solomon said: “A man’s gift makes room for him and brings him before the great.” What a turn of events! I was reminded this week of the story of Voltaire, the French writer and philosopher who died in 1778. He predicted that within 100 years of his death, Christianity would be extinct., Instead, within 50 years of his death, his estate was owned by the Geneva Bible Society, who used his house and his printing presses to make copies of the Bible! Haman and Voltaire, and all those who mock God and plot against His people are cut out of the same cloth.
- But wait. Haman is dead, but the edict is not. The law of the Medes and the Persians could not be revoked. It is hard for us to imagine ANYTHING irrevocable in this day and age where politicians and world leaders change their minds more often than their clothes, it would seem. But that was unheard of in the Persian empire. Let’s look at this text today and see what happens, and I will use these three headings: Esther’s plea, a new decree, and jubilee.
- **Esther’s Plea**
- There were still 8 and ½ months left until the deadly law would take effect, so Esther goes into action. She may have put on her brave face for the king at the feasts, but now she falls apart. Look at verse 3: she fell at her husband’s feet and wept and pleaded with him. This was not a ploy or a play on his emotions, but genuine, heart felt tears of anguish. She was afraid for her people, and possibly for her own life as well. And I don’t care how hard a man’s heart is-- when his wife is crying because she is genuinely afraid, his heart will melt. The king extended the golden scepter to his wife as if to say, “Whatever you want, I will do.” Look again at the humility of Esther in the way she asked for what was on her heart, in verse 5. Four qualifiers: if it please the king, and if I have found favor, and if you think this seems right, and (if) I am pleasing to you. Those qualifiers are NOT because Esther was unsure of what she is requesting! No, she had never been more sure of anything in her life. But they were there because she would not allow any boldness or brashness or even an attempt to persuade her husband to end up pushing him away. Again we see the wisdom of this young woman. As Solomon said in Prov. 16:24, “Gracious words are like a honeycomb,” and Esther was winning the king’s heart with her gracious words. She then asks for the edict to be averted and adds the final plea in verse 6: “How can I bear to see the calamity that is coming to my people? Or how can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred?” Again she appeals to the heart of her husband, that he would protect her from having to see the deadly evil that was coming for her people. I couldn’t help but think of the Planned Parenthood videos this week when reading these lines, and how it grieves the heart of God what is happening inside those clinics, and how it must grieve his heart when those who are called to protect the best interests of the lives of the American people, from the womb to the tomb, will not even watch the videos and examine the evidence. If they would, they might cry out, “How can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred?”
- **A New Decree**

- As we have said several times, the law of the Medes and the Persians cannot be revoked, so the king cannot just send out a message saying, “Bill Number 534-13 is now cancelled. Do not do what you were once told to do!” No, there has to be a new edict that will battle the old edict. Ahasuerus had once handed over his pen to Haman, and allowed him to write an edict that would lead to the destruction of the Jews. Now he does it again! He hands over his pen to Esther in verse 8 and says she can write Edict #2 that will go into the ring against Edict #1, and a champion will emerge. So the king’s scribes are summoned once again, and a new edict was written and sent by couriers on swift horses to all 127 provinces, in the language of each province and of each people group. And what did it do? Did it promote the idea that now the Jews could take up arms and go after every person in the kingdom who was not a Jew? Would it be a pre-emptive strike? A reversal of the Golden Rule that many live by, “Do unto others BEFORE they do unto you?” Is that what was written? No, not at all. Look at verse 11 and 12. The Jews could take up arms to DEFEND themselves against the armed forces that would be coming against them, even if those forces included women and children who were armed as well. And they could destroy them. But only in defense of their lives and only ON ONE DAY, the day that had been set by the first edict, the day when the people of the kingdom of Persia had been told to annihilate the Jews. This was a just war if ever there had been a just war. God was leveling the playing field, and clearly this is an argument for a nation being ready to defend itself against aggressors. The Jews had 8 months to get ready, to arm themselves, to prepare a strategy, and to pray for God’s protection as they defended themselves on that day. We will see next week, Lord willing, what happened on that day. But we know what happened on the day the new edict was issued, and when the news got to the Jews in every province.

- **Jubilee**

- I love the last three verses of this chapter. I can hear Kool and the Gang singing and see all the people dancing to, “Celebrate good times, come on!” Again, what a contrast! Look at the end of chapter 3. When the first edict went out into all the land, the people were thrown into confusion. They were in sackcloth and ashes. They were mourning and wailing and weeping. There was no joy, only sorrow. Now at the end of chapter 8, when the second edict makes its way through the kingdom, “The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honor.” (verse 16) And verse 17, “there was joy and gladness among the Jews, a feast and a holiday.” This day must have been like was November 9th, 1989 in Berlin, when the wall came down, and there was celebration all night and into the next day. This day was like, on a much smaller scale, the Fox’s house last Saturday night, starting at 6:25, when Mr. and Mrs. Isaiah Maher walked down the aisle as husband and wife for the first time, and then there was singing and celebration and dancing into the night. That was one of the things that struck me last week, as 300 of us gathered to witness the joyous occasion and celebrate it together: Christians know how to celebrate something good and godly better than anyone else on earth. And it’s because we have that which makes for celebration better than anything else on earth. The joy that we shared last week was not just for the couple, that God has brought a husband for Hannah, who chose Hannah to be his bride with the promise that they will walk together as husband and wife until death. On a much deeper level, we were celebrating the Gospel, that God had sent a Savior for US, who chose US to be His bride, so that we can walk together with Him in this life, through trials and troubles, and through death into the next life, where there will be endless celebration. The Psalmist said, “In Your presence is fullness of joy.” (Ps. 16:11) Jesus said to His followers, “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” (John 15:11) When we walk with the Lord, even through trials, and we celebrate what is good and pleasing to the Lord, our joy is full. And one more thought occurred to me last Saturday at the wedding. His presence is magnified and on display when His people are together, as we were at the wedding and as we are every Sunday for worship. We still have trials and troubles ahead of us, or WITH us, don’t we? Of course. But we can rejoice because we have been redeemed, we have been delivered, and we will be delivered through every trial and trouble. And God is glorified in HOW we walk through those trials and troubles with Him. What if

the Jews had said when they heard about the second edict, "Big deal! We still have to prepare and get our weapons together and plan a strategy. And we still have to go into battle and we still have to fight! Why couldn't God just come down and take out our enemies? Why do we have to struggle?!" That would have been dishonoring to the Lord, wouldn't it? I like what Ray Stedman wrote:

- "When, because of your faith, your life too becomes perceptibly different; when your reactions are quite opposite to what the situation seems to call for and your activities can no longer be explained in terms of your personality; that is when your neighborhood will sit up and take notice. In the eyes of the world, it is not our relationship with Jesus Christ that counts; it is our resemblance to Him! In the midst of circumstances that look like certain defeat, there is no more powerful testimony than the joy produced by faith."
- Amen. It was a celebration to remember that night in Susa, as once again the people saw God take care of His little flock.