
God's People Rescued

Esther 8:1 - 10:3

Russ Kennedy

How does God bring about the salvation of His people? How will they be kept from being exterminated?

Remember how we get here...

So, it is the day after the second banquet the king, Ahaseurus, attended. It had been thrown for him and Haman, his viceroy, by his queen, Esther. She had been selected to be queen when Ahaseurus had been defied by his first queen and she had been deposed. Now, this man, Haman, has been promoted to the highest post in the Persian Empire. But the queen's cousin, who has reared her as his own child, has refused to honor Haman. In revenge, Haman has schemed to produce a royal edict to have all of Mordecai's people exterminated. Haman hates Mordecai and the Jews. He built 75 foot high gallows on which he planned to hang Mordecai. But in a great turn of events, The King takes Haman's counsel, turns it on him and requires Haman to lead a parade to honor Mordecai. At Esther's banquet that evening, Haman is exposed, accused and convicted of his plot to exterminate the Jews. He is taken out and hung on the gallows he made.

Now, let's listen as the Bible tell the rest of the story....

Its Brilliant Plan

(8:1-17)

On the day that the enemy of Mordecai and the Jews is hung, we look into the palace grounds of Susa and watch the drama unfold.

Mordecai's Elevation in the Kingdom

(v. 1-2)

¹ On that day King Ahasuerus gave to Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had told what he was to her. ² And the king took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.

Mordecai is honored and elevated in two ways.

By King Ahasuerus, he is made vice-regent of the Persian Empire. He is given the signet ring of the king so that he may act on behalf of the king.

By Queen Esther, he is placed as head of the family of Haman. He now owns their fortune and their future.

Esther's Plea for her People

(v. 3-8)

³ Then Esther spoke again to the king. She fell at his feet and wept and pleaded with him to avert the evil plan of Haman the Agagite and the plot that he had devised against the Jews. ⁴ When the king held out the golden scepter to Esther, ⁵ Esther rose and stood before the king. And she said, "If it please the king, and if I have found favor in his sight, and if the thing seems right before the king, and I am pleasing in his eyes, let an order be written to revoke

the letters devised by Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, which he wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the provinces of the king. ⁶ For 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?" ⁷ Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, "Behold, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows, because he intended to lay hands on the Jews. ⁸ But you may write as you please with regard to the Jews, in the name of the king, and seal it with the king's ring, for an edict written in the name of the king and sealed with the king's ring cannot be revoked."

Queen Esther prostrates herself before the queen and pleads for her people. How can she stand by while they will be exterminated? Surely, there is something the king can do. Listen to how she pleads: if it is pleasing, if she has found favor, if it is right and if she is a delight to him, revoke the letters.

King Ahasuerus authorizes them to write an edict that will rescue their people. He ensures that what they write will have the full force of a royal decree. But his earlier edict cannot be revoked. Something else will have to be provided for in the decree.

The Edict Delivered throughout the Kingdom

(v. 9-14)

⁹ The king's scribes were summoned at that time, in the third month, which is the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third day. And an edict was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded concerning the Jews, to the satraps and the governors and the officials of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, 127 provinces, to each province in its own script and to each people in its own language, and also to the Jews in their script and their language. ¹⁰ And he wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed it with the king's signet ring. Then he sent the letters by mounted couriers riding on swift horses that were used in the king's service, bred from the royal stud, ¹¹ saying that the king allowed the Jews who were in every city to gather and defend their lives, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate any armed force of any people or province that might attack them, children and women included, and to plunder their goods, ¹² on one day throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. ¹³ A copy of what was written was to be issued as a decree in every province, being publicly displayed to all peoples, and the Jews were to be ready on that day to take vengeance on their enemies. ¹⁴ So the couriers, mounted on their swift horses that were used in the king's service, rode out hurriedly, urged by the king's command. And the decree was issued in Susa the citadel.

Because the earlier edict cannot be rescinded, a new edict is written authorizing the Jews to defend themselves on the day set for their extermination. Their enemies may attempt to use the day to destroy them. But the Jews may form militias to defend themselves even against Persian forces. The effect of this should be to warn the governors of the provinces not to attack them. The edict was written in every language and script. Using the Persian version of the Pony Express, it was sent to every province under the royal seal.

The Jews Recognized among the People

(v. 15-17)

¹⁵ Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal robes of blue and white, with a great golden crown and a robe of fine linen and purple, and the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced. ¹⁶ The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honor. ¹⁷ And in every province and in every city, wherever the king's command and his edict reached, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many from the peoples of the country declared themselves Jews, for fear of the Jews had fallen on them.

The scene here is a direct contrast to the elevation of Haman. Mordecai becomes the vice-regent and a new regime is in place. The edict brings joy to the Jews and fear to their enemies. No longer is there fear and confusion among the people. Instead, the Jews are now recognized, received and even aligned with by many in the kingdom. So God's people will be preserved. It will be a hard day, that day coming. But God's people will live even under the sentence of death.

Its Bloody Victory

(9:1-15)

That day comes. It will be a day to remember, a day of bloody victory.

In the Provinces of Persia

(v. 1-5)

In spite of the decree, throughout the provinces, there were people who were going to attack the Jews because they hated the Jews so much.

¹ Now in the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king's command and edict were about to be carried out, on the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, the reverse occurred: the Jews gained mastery over those who hated them. ² The Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm. And no one could stand against them, for the fear of them had fallen on all peoples. ³ All the officials of the provinces and the satraps and the governors and the royal agents also helped the Jews, for the fear of Mordecai had fallen on them. ⁴ For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces, for the man Mordecai grew more and more powerful. ⁵ The Jews struck all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and did as they pleased to those who hated them.

The narrative is so low key. But the reality was deadly. Small groups were gathering, plotting, arming to attack the hated Jews. The Jews were banding together to arm and defend themselves. The provincial governors and their military people were giving all aid and assistance to the Jews. The fear of the Jews had fallen on the people and the fear of Mordecai's power had fallen on the leaders.

In one long day, there were pitched battles in cities and in the countryside. The Jews prevailed. They wielded the sword with such skill and power that the victory was overwhelmingly in their favor.

In the Capital of Persia**(v. 6-15)**

In the capital, Susa, the great enemy is the household of Haman.

⁶ In Susa the citadel itself the Jews killed and destroyed 500 men, ⁷ and also killed Parshandatha and Dalphon and Aspatha ⁸ and Poratha and Adalia and Aridatha ⁹ and Parmashta and Arisai and Aridai and Vaizatha, ¹⁰ the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews, but they laid no hand on the plunder.

¹¹ That very day the number of those killed in Susa the citadel was reported to the king. ¹² And the king said to Queen Esther, "In Susa the citadel the Jews have killed and destroyed 500 men and also the ten sons of Haman. What then have they done in the rest of the king's provinces! Now what is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what further is your request? It shall be fulfilled." ¹³ And Esther said, "If it please the king, let the Jews who are in Susa be allowed tomorrow also to do according to this day's edict. And let the ten sons of Haman be hanged on the gallows." ¹⁴ So the king commanded this to be done. A decree was issued in Susa, and the ten sons of Haman were hanged. ¹⁵ The Jews who were in Susa gathered also on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and they killed 300 men in Susa, but they laid no hands on the plunder.

The Jews in Susa were attacked and they killed 500 men. This included the ten sons of Haman who appear to be among the attackers. The report is brought to Ahasuerus, the king. I think he is surprised by how few, not how many casualties there are. Noting the success of Esther and Mordecai's plan, He offers her another request. "One more day," is her request. And take the bodies of Haman's sons and hang them like their father. This is not vindictiveness, but right caution. It serves to warn the populace what happens when you attack God's people.

He grants her request and publishes the edict in Susa. The next day, the Jews attacked and killed 300 men and hung the bodies of the sons of Haman.

Some of this is hard for us to grasp. This all sounds so brutal. But remember what was at stake. The Jews faced extermination. They were much hated. Their enemies were many. Even given the edicts of king to authorizing the Jews' self-defense, some still attacked them. So, God mightily helped them to overcome their enemies.

Its Blessed Festival

(9:16-10:3)

We have national days where we celebrate great events, including great victories over our enemies.

Its Inaugural Celebration

(9:16-19)

¹⁶ Now the rest of the Jews who were in the king's provinces also gathered to defend their lives, and got relief from their enemies and killed 75,000 of those who hated them, but they laid no hands on the plunder. ¹⁷ This was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and on the fourteenth day they rested and made that a day of feasting and gladness. ¹⁸ But the Jews who were in Susa gathered on the thirteenth day and on the fourteenth, and rested on the fifteenth day, making that a day of feasting and gladness. ¹⁹ Therefore the Jews of the villages, who live in the rural towns, hold the fourteenth day of the month of Adar as a day for gladness and feasting, as a holiday, and as a day on which they send gifts of food to one another.

A great feast of gladness is inaugurated to celebrate their deliverance. The first celebration was on two different days because of the second edict. So outside Susa was on the 14th and in Susa, on the 15th of Adar, which is around March. The people celebrated the sparing of their lives.

Its Public Recognition

(9:20-22)

²⁰ And Mordecai recorded these things and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, ²¹ obliging them to keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same, year by year, ²² as the days on which the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor.

Mordecai makes the festival official. Every year on the 14th and 15th of Adar, this great deliverance was to be remembered and celebrated. It was to be a feast of gladness and joy. They were to send gifts to one another and to be sure the poor were provided for and could participate.

Its Historical Review

(9:23-28)

²³ So the Jews accepted what they had started to do, and what Mordecai had written to them. ²⁴ For Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur (that is, cast lots), to crush and to destroy them. ²⁵ But when it came before the king, he gave orders in writing that his evil plan that he had devised against the Jews should return on his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. ²⁶ Therefore they called these days Purim, after the term Pur. Therefore, because of all that was written in this letter, and of what they had faced in this matter, and of what had happened to them, ²⁷ the Jews firmly obligated themselves and their offspring and all who joined them, that without fail they would keep these two days according to what was written and at the time appointed every year, ²⁸ that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, in every clan, province, and city, and that these days of Purim should never fall into disuse among the Jews, nor should the commemoration of these days cease among their descendants.

The author of Esther now provides a review designed to highlight why this festival is called the Feast of Purim. The term Pur refers to the results of casting the lots, or throwing the dice. It is used here to show that God is in control. There is no Pur outside of the sovereign control of God. The fateful day was originally chosen by casting the die. But that day and all the events flowing around it happen according God's great plan.

Initially there was a popular agreement that these days would be celebrated. But that would not be enough. It needed divine and official sanction.

Its Official Authorization

(9:29-32)

²⁹ Then Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew gave full written authority, confirming this second letter about Purim. ³⁰ Letters were sent to all the Jews, to the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, in words of peace and truth, ³¹ that these days of Purim should be observed at their appointed seasons, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther obligated them, and as they had obligated themselves and their offspring, with regard to their fasts and their lamenting. ³² The command of Queen Esther confirmed these practices of Purim, and it was recorded in writing.

So the Jewish Queen and Jewish Prime Minister of the Persian Empire in the capital city of Persia, Susa (you do hear the irony, right?) issue a letter making this feast an official part of the Jewish calendar. The record of this was made in the Persian annals. It was also recorded in writing, probably becoming this book of Esther.

Its Great Leader

(10:1-3)

¹ King Ahasuerus imposed tax on the land and on the coastlands of the sea. ² And all the acts of his power and might, and the full account of the high honor of Mordecai, to which the king advanced him, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia? ³ For Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Ahasuerus, and he was great among the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brothers, for he sought the welfare of his people and spoke peace to all his people.

In a great change, King Ahasuerus imposed a tax on all the kingdom. This system replaced funding the government through conquest, through plunder. Several times in this account, the Jews are noted for *not* plundering their enemies. Their not doing so may have been at the direction of Queen Esther and Mordecai and the new system devised by them.

Reflect and Respond

Two simple truths to reflect on at the close of the story:

What makes a man great is that he seeks the welfare of his people and speaks peace to all his people. This is the kind of man Mordecai was. This is the kind of Redeemer Jesus is....

God may be invisible but He is not absent...