

Out With The Old . . . In With The New!

Our Text: **Esther 8:7-17** *Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and Mordecai the Jew, “Indeed, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows because he tried to lay his hand on the Jews. You yourselves write a decree concerning the Jews, as you please, in the king’s name, and seal it with the king’s signet ring; for whatever is written in the king’s name and sealed with the king’s signet ring no one can revoke.”*

So the king’s scribes were called at that time, in the third month, which is the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third day; and it was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded, to the Jews, the satraps, the governors, and the princes of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, one hundred and twenty-seven provinces in all, to every province in its own script, to every people in their own language, and to the Jews in their own script and language. And he wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, sealed it with the king’s signet ring, and sent letters by couriers on horseback, riding on royal horses bred from swift steeds.

By these letters the king permitted the Jews who were in every city to gather together and protect their lives—to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people or province that would assault them, both little children and women, and to plunder their possessions, on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province and published for all people, so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. The couriers who rode on royal horses went out, hastened and pressed on by the king’s command. And the decree was issued in Shushan the citadel.

So Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, with a great crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple; and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad. The Jews had light and gladness, joy and honor. And in every province and city, wherever the king’s command and decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a holiday. Then many of the people of the land became Jews, because fear of the Jews fell upon them.

Last week we read that somebody needed to act, and act quick, to save the Jews from extermination. So two “somebodys” stepped up to the plate . . . **MORDECAI AND ESTHER!!!**

In Esther’s example, we were encouraged to come to God’s throne and intercede on behalf of others, especially the nations of the world where lost souls need to be delivered from death:

James 4:2 *You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.*

But the royal law still called for the Jewish people to be exterminated . . . So a new law had to be written to override it!

Let’s dive in here . . .

The New Proclamation!

Esther 8:7-17 *Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and Mordecai the Jew, “Indeed, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows because he tried to lay his hand on the Jews. You yourselves write a decree concerning the Jews, as you please, in the*

king's name, and seal it with the king's signet ring; for whatever is written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet ring no one can revoke."

So the king's scribes were called at that time, in the third month, which is the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third day; and it was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded, to the Jews, the satraps, the governors, and the princes of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, one hundred and twenty-seven provinces in all, to every province in its own script, to every people in their own language, and to the Jews in their own script and language. And he wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, sealed it with the king's signet ring, and sent letters by couriers on horseback, riding on royal horses bred from swift steeds.

By these letters the king permitted the Jews who were in every city to gather together and protect their lives—to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people or province that would assault them, both little children and women, and to plunder their possessions, on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province and published for all people, so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. The couriers who rode on royal horses went out, hastened and pressed on by the king's command. And the decree was issued in Shushan the citadel.

So Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, with a great crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple; and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad. The Jews had light and gladness, joy and honor. And in every province and city, wherever the king's command and decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a holiday. Then many of the people of the land became Jews, because fear of the Jews fell upon them.

The problem Esther and Mordecai faced was that the king had made an executive fiat. Because of this, Ahasuerus couldn't cancel the first edict since the laws of the Medes and Persians were "**unalterable**".

- In modern democratic nations, legislatures can reverse decisions and revoke laws.
- In fact, the supreme court of the land can even declare laws unconstitutional.
- But this was not so in the ancient despotic Persian Empire.
- The voice of the king was the law of the land, and the king could do no wrong.

So . . . King Ahasuerus couldn't legally revoke his edict . . . **BUT HE COULD ISSUE A NEW DECREE THAT WOULD FAVOR THE JEWS!!!**

This new decree would let everybody in the empire know that the king wanted his people to have a different attitude toward the Jews and look favorably upon them.

I like Warren Wiersbe's note on this passage, "***The citizens didn't have to hire a lawyer to explain the new edict to them. You can be sure they got the message: Don't attack the Jews on March 7!***"

They would need somebody to draft this decree . . . **SO, Since Mordecai was now prime minister, it would be his job to draft the new decree!** What he simply did was **give the Jews permission to defend themselves against anybody who tried to kill them and take their property.**

Why this decree? There were many people in the empire like Haman, who hated the Jews, wanted to destroy them, and get their hands on their wealth. But this new decree allowed the Jews to assemble and defend themselves, but they were not allowed to be the aggressors.

Just FYI . . . **The legal use of self-defense is an invaluable weapon to stop evil in its tracks!**

Here's where some versions may get a little confusing . . . On the translation of verse 11:

*NKJV: **Esther 8:11** By these letters the king permitted the Jews who were in every city to gather together and protect their lives—to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people or province that would assault them, both little children and women, and to plunder their possessions,*

It seems like the decree gave the Jews permission to kill the women and children of their attackers. While this might serve as a strong deterrent, this is not what the text is saying.

In order to see it a little clearer, let's look at the NIV:

*NIV: **Esther 8:11** The king's edict granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves; to destroy, kill and annihilate the armed men of any nationality or province who might attack them and their women and children, and to plunder the property of their enemies.*

Notice that the NIV connects "**women and children**" with the Jews being attacked and doesn't suggest that the Jews killed the women and children of their attackers. This would be rendered the more accurate meaning of the text.

Let's go back and read the original decree in Esther 3:10–13:

***Esther 3:10–13** So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. "Keep the money," the king said to Haman, "and do with the people as you please."*

Then on the thirteenth day of the first month the royal secretaries were summoned. They wrote out in the script of each province and in the language of each people all Haman's orders to the king's satraps, the governors of the various provinces and the nobles of the various peoples. These were written in the name of King Xerxes himself and sealed with his own ring. Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews—young and old, women and children—on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods.

Notice the similarity of the wording of the two decrees. This means that Mordecai used the "**official language**" of the government, because legal statements must be expressed in legal language.

This language may seem strange to lay-people like us, but without it we would have confusion and misinterpretation. You can't write the law the way you write a poem or a recipe.

So what did he specifically write?

Esther 8:9 *So the king's scribes were called at that time, in the third month, which is the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third day; and it was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded, to the Jews, the satraps, the governors, and the princes of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, one hundred and twenty-seven provinces in all, to every province in its own script, to every people in their own language, and to the Jews in their own script and language.*

- According to this verse, the new edict was written on the twenty-third day of the third month, which on our calendar would be June 25, 474 BC. (*Remember, the Jewish calendar begins with the month of April.*)
- The first decree was issued on April 17. (*Esther 3:12*)
- Thus, about seventy days had passed since Haman had declared war on the Jews. **“D Day”** for the Jews was March 7. (*Esther 3:13*)
- Therefore, the people had about eight months to get ready.

Another thing we really have to ponder is whether it was really ethical (godly) or not for Mordecai to give the Jews the authority to **“destroy, kill, annihilate, and plunder”**.

Some people who deny the divine inspiration of the Bible like to point to the various **“massacres”** in Scripture as evidence that the God of the Bible is **“a bully”**. They say things like, *“How can you worship a god that commanded the slaughter of whole populations?!”*

Let's just logically look at this edict, since it's the passage we're in, and carefully consider a few things . . .

- First, we must consider the edict that Ahasuerus issued, for that's where all the trouble started.
- If it was wicked for Mordecai to tell the Jews to defend themselves, then it was even more wicked for Haman and Ahasuerus to tell the Persians to attack the Jews in the first place!
- **Self-defense isn't a crime, but genocide definitely is!**
- So if these critics don't approve of this edict, we should ask them, *“Do you approve of King Ahasuerus' original edict?”*
- *If they don't approve of the king's decree, which permitted murder, then how can they disapprove of Mordecai's decree, which allowed the Jews the right to defend themselves?*
- True . . . It would have been better that Haman's decree had never been issued.
- But **SINCE IT WAS**, better that Mordecai disarmed it by issuing his decree.

Now, if we jump ahead and look at the record in chapter 9, we will discover three important facts:

1) The Jews killed only those who attacked them.

2) They killed only the men.

Esther 9:6 And in Shushan the citadel the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men.

Esther 9:12 And the king said to Queen Esther, “The Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the citadel, and the ten sons of Haman. What have they done in the rest of the king’s provinces? Now what is your petition? It shall be granted to you. Or what is your further request? It shall be done.”

Esther 9:15 And the Jews who were in Shushan gathered together again on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and killed three hundred men at Shushan; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder.

3) They didn’t lay hands on the loot, although they had the right to do so.

Esther 9:10 the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews—they killed; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder.

Esther 9:15–16 And the Jews who were in Shushan gathered together again on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and killed three hundred men at Shushan; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder.

The remainder of the Jews in the king’s provinces gathered together and protected their lives, had rest from their enemies, and killed seventy-five thousand of their enemies; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder.

The fact that the Jews killed eight hundred men in the city of Shushan alone proves that there were many Persians just waiting for the opportunity to attack God’s people. (*This is not to mention that it’s estimated that there were probably half a million people in the capital city.*)

The total number of men who tried to attack the Jews and were killed by them in self-defense was seventy-five thousand:

Esther 9:16 The remainder of the Jews in the king’s provinces gathered together and protected their lives, had rest from their enemies, and killed seventy-five thousand of their enemies; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder.

So, there were more than seventy-five thousand people were prepared to slaughter *defenseless* Jews. These people were even willing to attack *when they knew the Jews would protect themselves* which validates that anti-Semitism was very strong throughout the empire. **ALL OF THIS HOWS THAT GOD’S ALLOWANCE OF MORDECAI’S EDECT OF SELF-DEFENSE WAS JUST!!!**

So when the critics say it was wrong for the Jews to kill seventy-five thousand would-be murderers . . . Just throw a question back on them, “**Would it have been better if the seventy-five thousand Persians had killed ten times as many Jews?!**”

Mordecai’s decree was in complete harmony with God’s covenant with Abraham: *Genesis 12:3 I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*

Isaac also would have agreed with Mordecai, for when Isaac blessed Jacob, he said:

***Genesis 27:29* Let peoples serve you, And nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, And let your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, And blessed be those who bless you!"**

In addition, God promised Moses,
***Exodus 23:22* But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.**

And don't forget that quotation from Dr. J. Vernon McGee: ***"The Jew has attended the funeral of every one of the nations that tried to exterminate him!"***

So now that this law was passed, they had to get the message out to the people! So Mordecai put the secretaries to work translating and copying the decree, and then he sent the couriers to carry the good news to the people in the various provinces of the empire:

***Esther 8:13-14* A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province and published for all people, so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. The couriers who rode on royal horses went out, hastened and pressed on by the king's command. And the decree was issued in Shushan the citadel.**

Notice that the couriers ***"hastened"*** because they were ***"pressed on by the king's command"***.

"If only the church today were like those secretaries and couriers! How we need to tell the peoples of the world in their own languages the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ! The King has commanded us, and we must go, but for some reason we linger. If a group of pagan scribes and messengers, without modern means of transportation and communication, could take Mordecai's decree to an entire empire, how much more should Christian workers be able to take Christ's gospel to a lost world!" Warren Wiersbe

- This chapter begins with Queen Esther in tears. (*Esther 8:3*)
- **But it ends with the Jews rejoicing and feasting!** (*Esther 8:15–17*)
- **In fact, happiness of one kind or another is mentioned in this paragraph at least seven times!** (*This is the eighth feast mentioned in the book of Esther.*)

The thing that made the difference was not the *writing* of the decree or even its *distribution* in the various provinces . . . **The thing that made the difference was the fact that the Jews believed the decree!**

It was their faith in Mordecai's words that changed their lives . . . **They had hope, joy, and peace because they had faith in what the prime minister said!**

Romans 15:13 Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now let's quickly look at one last thing in the last verse:

Esther 8:17 And in every province and city, wherever the king's command and decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a holiday. Then many of the people of the land became Jews, because fear of the Jews fell upon them.

The statement that ***“many of the people of the land became Jews”*** is variously interpreted. *So what does it mean?*

- The obvious meaning is that many Gentiles in the empire forsook their pagan religions and became Jewish proselytes.
- But since the Jews were far from Jerusalem and the ministry of the priests, these “converts” couldn't be initiated fully into the Jewish faith.
- Thus, they became what were known later as ***“Godfearers”*** or ***“worshippers of God”***. (*Acts 10:2; Acts 16:14; Acts 18:7*)

What many commentators agree on is that the phrase means that many of the Gentiles in the empire sided with the Jews and acted as though they were Jews. They weren't ashamed to be identified with the Jews even though the Jews had enemies.

After President Reagan was shot, when he was being prepared for surgery, he jokingly said to the medical team, ***“I hope all of you are Republicans.”*** One of the doctors replied, ***“Mr. President, today all of us are Republicans.”***

That was the attitude of many of the people in the Persian Empire when Mordecai's edict was published: ***“Today, all of us are Jews.”***

- The book of Esther opens with the Jews keeping a very low profile, so much so that Esther and Mordecai wouldn't even confess their nationality.
- But now the Jews are proud of their race and so happy with what God had done that they were attracting others to their faith!
- Even the pagan Gentiles could see that God was caring for His people in a remarkable way!

Evangelist Billy Sunday said, ***“If you have no joy in your religion, there's a leak in your Christianity somewhere.”***

If Christian believers today manifested more of the joy of the Lord, perhaps those outside the faith would be attracted to the church and be willing to consider the message of the gospel . . . It's worth trying.

Let's pray . . .