

Notes on Esther 8

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C. The Decree to Spare the Jews Is Issued – Chap. 8

Mordecai is exalted

Verses 1,2

1. What position did the king give Esther? What did she tell the king about (v1)?
2. What did the king do for Mordecai? What did Esther do for him?

Esther given authority over Haman's house

At this point in the story, Haman had fallen from favor and been slain. However, there is more to the story. We will see even further the greatness of the victory of Esther and Mordecai over Haman's treachery.

First, the king set Esther herself in charge over Haman's house. She was given the great wealth that he had bragged so much about. (I'm not sure how much else was involved in being over Haman's house.) Not only did Haman lose his position and honor that had led to such pride, but he also lost all his wealth to one of the very people whom he had sought to destroy!

But honor was given, not just to Esther, but also to Mordecai. He was advanced to high position before the king. This occurred, not only because of the good he had formerly done in sparing the king's life, but also because Esther told the king about Mordecai's relationship to her. This had not been made known till this point, when Esther revealed her nationality.

Mordecai exalted to Haman's position

For all these reasons, the king then exalted Mordecai to the very position that Haman had occupied. The ring, which was the symbol of the king's authority and which had been given to Haman, was here given instead to Mordecai. This showed that he was the most exalted of all the king's ministers.

Further, Esther, who had been set over the house of Haman (v1), in turn put Mordecai over that house. All this simply demonstrates that the exaltation, which Haman formerly possessed, now belonged in every detail to the very one whom he considered his chief enemy and whom he had sought to kill. But Haman had been slain in the very manner in which he had intended to slay Mordecai. The reversal is here complete.

There still remained, however, one major problem that had not yet been overcome. We must yet consider how it can be reversed. Haman himself, the issuer of the decree of death to the Jews, had been slain. But the decree itself yet stood. The real root problem had yet to be resolved; only the perpetrator of the problem had fallen.

Esther requests to reverse Haman's decree.

Verses 3-6

3. Despite these achievements, what problem yet remained? What did Esther do about it?
4. Application: List other examples from life in which the evil things people do may outlive them.

Esther again goes before the king.

In tears Esther approached the king again and even fell at his feet, imploring him to counteract the decree that had been made by Haman against the Jews. At first she did as she had done before: she came into the court of the king uninvited, hoping that he would call her forward, rather than allow her to be slain (cf. 5:1ff). (It appears that we are here informed first what her purpose was in going before the king, but she actually makes this known to the king in v5.)

As before, the king held out the golden censer to Esther, granting her the right to speak and not die. She then arose and respectfully asked, according to the king's will, if he was truly pleased with her, if he could write letters to revoke the decree of Haman to annihilate the Jews in all the king's provinces.

The lasting effects of sin

Notice how Haman's decree actually outlived him. He himself was no longer able to pursue his vindictiveness against the Jews and had even been slain, yet the effect of his wickedness lived on. So with us, the effect of our sins may continue on affecting our lives or the lives of others even after we have repented or even died.

For example, we may live in sin when our children are small; we may later repent and become faithful, yet they may choose to continue in sin. We may teach false doctrine and later learn the truth and repent, but the people we taught the error may refuse to change. We may drink or smoke for years then later quit, but our body may yet be so diseased that it cannot be healed; or the family that was destroyed by our drinking may never be restored. We may squander our wealth in riotous living, then later repent and be forgiven, yet the wealth is gone, our job may be lost, etc. We may commit adultery then repent, but we must still care of the child we conceived out of wedlock or our spouse may refuse to trust us and determine to divorce us. We may commit murder, but our repentance will not bring the victim back to life. We may commit a crime, but repentance will not free us from prison.

Esther's concern for her people

Esther explained further to the king her motives for her request. She could not stand to see such evil and destruction perpetrated on her people (cf. 7:3,4). Surely it was this love and concern that motivated her to act so bravely on their behalf (4:8-16).

Here is another important lesson for us. We have a grave responsibility to save people around us from destruction. Consider how much more serious is the destruction caused by sin than even that of physical death. If Esther needed to speak out to save her people from death, how much more do we need to save those around us from sin? If we have love and concern as Esther did, we must speak. To fail to speak is to demonstrate that we don't really care for their souls. It is interesting how much effort people are willing to expend to save people from physical danger, yet we do little or nothing when we face the far greater danger of eternal destruction for sin!

Verses 7,8

5. Why was Haman's decree not simply reversed? What did the king authorize Esther and Mordecai to do?

The king grants permission for a new decree.

The king then reminded Esther and Mordecai that he had hung Haman and put Esther over his house, because Haman had opposed the Jews. It is unclear whether the king said this to rationalize his own responsibility for the decree against the Jews or whether he was just reassuring them that he was still willing to help further with the problem.

In any case, he then gave them blanket permission to issue whatever decree they wish to make, write it in his name, and seal it with his ring. The one thing they had to remember, however, was that the law of a Persian king could never be reversed once it had been issued in his name and sealed with his ring. This meant, first, that they could not directly revoke the previous decree; it must be allowed to stand, so they must find some other means to solve the problem. The second application of this was that their decree would also be irrevocable. So they should be sure that it was just, realizing that it too could not be reversed. They should not repeat the error of Haman in issuing an unwise decree. This also meant, however, that once they made a new decree, no one in the kingdom could prevent them from carrying it out.

Mordecai and Esther issue a new decree.

Verses 9,10

6. How was Mordecai's decree made known to the people?

The scribes assembled to copy the decree

Once again the scribes were called to issue another decree. This occurred on the 23rd day of the third month. This means it was two months and ten days since the original decree had been issued (3:7,12). This decree was also to be sent to the Jews and to all the rulers in all the provinces, according to their own language, just as had been done with the original decree (3:12). In addition, we are given further information regarding the size of the empire: it included 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia.

The decree was written again in the king's name, sealed with his ring, and sent out by his couriers, who rode swiftly on royal horses. This was also how the first decree had gone out (3:15).

Verses 11-14

7. What did the decree state? How did this decree differ from the original decree?

The decree allows the Jews to defend themselves.

Here we are given the substance of the decree Esther and Mordecai wrote. The decree could not reverse the fact that the Jews' enemies had been given permission to attack them, since the previous decree was irrevocable (v8). So the new decree gave the Jews the right to use force to defend and protect themselves against their enemies, and in fact, they could even kill and plunder anyone who attacked them. The previous decree had granted the Jews' enemies the right to kill and plunder the Jews. This decree gave the Jews the right to do the same to anyone who did choose to assault them.

It is unclear to me whether this means that they could only act in strict self-defense, slaying only those who physically attacked them on this day, or whether it also granted them the right to take offensive action and attack any who had wronged them in time past or those who might have originally planned to attack them under the original decree (even if they now were to change their mind). It seems that they did the latter, though I am not sure. Such wars were fought at various times by the nation of Israel under the Old Testament. (Note: The latter course would have been as wrong on their part as Haman's original decree had been, but for the fact that these enemies were known to be evil, opposing God's will and His people.)

The day on which the Jews could do this was the same day that Haman had originally decreed for people to destroy the Jews – the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (cf. 3:13). All this, of course, did not technically reverse the original decree, but it had that effect in the end. The original decree had said nothing about whether or not the Jews would be allowed to defend themselves and even to attack those who attacked them. This decree defined that they could strike back against those who attacked them.

We will see, however, that the effect was much greater than that. The effect of the original decree would have been to put all the force of the empire behind those who would attack the Jews. Their enemies would have been openly and officially encouraged by the government of the empire to attack the Jews, and probably the empire's armies and officials would have been encouraged to join in. All who did so would receive the spoils. Now, however, this part would be effectively reversed. It was now clear that the force of the empire was on the Jews' side and against their enemies.

This decree was written and circulated throughout the empire, so the Jews could make ready for the appointed time.

The Jews rejoice in the new decree

Verses 15-17

8. Describe the honors that were given Mordecai.
9. How did the Jews feel about the new decree? How were other people affected?
10. Although the new decree did not directly revoke the old decree, how would Mordecai's position and favor help counteract the first decree?

The honor of Mordecai

Mordecai had been exalted to such high position that he was provided apparel to show his position. His clothing was royal apparel of blue and white colors. He wore a great golden crown and also a garment of purple color made from fine linen (probably a robe or outer garment).

The joy of the people

Whereas the original decree had caused great consternation among the people, this one led to great joy and gladness, even in the city of Shushan. The Jews especially rejoiced with gladness and honor. This was easily understandable considering the seriousness of the original decree.

As news of the decree spread to every province and city, the Jews there would rejoice with feasting and gladness. The result was (as mentioned above) that great fear fell on all the people because of the Jews (this would lead them to fear to attack the Jews on the decreed day and would even lead many to fight on the Jews' side).

In fact, many people even became Jews. This is a clear reference to the practice of proselytes to the Jewish religion. People born as descendants of the Jews were automatically in covenant relationship, but here we are clearly shown that other people could also join the religion.

However, it is not easy to be sure of the motives of these people. It could mean that people converted to Judaism in order to enjoy the honor and wealth that the Jews would receive when the decreed day occurred. Such would be a completely unacceptable reason for converting, since it showed no honor to God. On the other hand, it could be that the people saw that the events that had occurred proved that God was with the Jews. They had seen evidence of His power working in the Jewish nation, so they believed in the God the Jews worshiped.

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