

Notes on Esther 9

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D. The Jews Slay Their Enemies – 9:1-18

The first day of slaughter

Verses 1,2

1. What day arrived at this point in the story? What had the Jews' enemies hoped to achieve then?
2. Where did the Jews meet? Why could no one withstand them?

The appointed day arrives.

The day that Haman had appointed for the Jews to be destroyed was the 13th day of the twelfth month of the year (Adar). This was the day appointed in the command that Haman had decreed by the authority of the king (cf. 3:13). That decree could not be changed, so on that day the enemies had authority to attack and destroy the Jews. However, at the influence of Esther and Mordecai, a new decree had been issued that on that day the Jews could not only defend themselves but could even slay those who hated them and had wanted to destroy them (8:11,12). So this was the day that the Jews' enemies had hoped to overpower and slay them, but instead the opposite happened and the Jews overpowered and slew their enemies.

In theory, the Jews' enemies could still have prevailed against them, but the reasons why the Jews prevailed are explained as the story unfolds. The Jews gathered together in the cities throughout the provinces of Persia to fight against their enemies. This enabled them to take advantage of the strength of numbers, rather than being attacked individually.

But specifically mentioned is the fact that the fear of the Jews had fallen on all the people. This was probably due to the fate of Haman and the power of Mordecai, as discussed further in the following verses. People had just become convinced that the Jews' enemies would not prevail, so they tended to be afraid to attack them.

Verses 3-5

3. Who helped the Jews? Why?
4. Describe the respect shown to Mordecai.

The assistance of government officials

Another reason the Jews prevailed was that they were assisted by government officials. In fact all the people involved in the king's service helped the Jews. The reason is stated: they recognized and feared the power and influence of Mordecai.

Had Haman still been in power, the people would have believed that they could attack the Jews without harm coming to them. The government would have been behind their attacks, approving it and perhaps even helping in it. But now that Haman had fallen and Mordecai had come to power, the people feared to oppose Mordecai's power. The government now stood with Mordecai, so government agents helped the Jews instead of their enemies.

The influence of Mordecai

The reason the people feared to oppose Mordecai was, as v4 says, because he was great, increasingly prominent, and his fame had spread throughout the provinces of the empire. This led people to fear to oppose the Jews, so the Jews were able to defeat their enemies with slaughter and destruction as they willed without successful opposition.

Verses 6-10

5. What did the Jews do to their enemies? Specifically, what happened in Shushan?

Jews' enemies defeated in the citadel Shusan

Those whom the Jews killed included 500 people just in the citadel of Shusan itself where the king lived. Included among this number were the ten sons of Haman, who are named in these verses. Haman had sought to slay all the Jews, and he had been extremely proud of all his sons (5:11). But in the end not only did he die, but all his sons also were slain.

We are told, however, that the Jews did not touch the plunder. That is, they took no spoils from those they killed. This is repeated in vv 15,16. The decree that had been issued expressly allowed them to plunder their enemies (see 8:11), but they chose not to do so. Perhaps this was done to show that they did not act from a desire for wealth – theirs was not an attack of aggression for their own gain. Their motives were entirely based on self-defense and protection against those who had sought to harm them.

Verses 11-15

6. What did the king ask Esther, and how did she respond?

7. What happened to Haman's sons, and what happened in Shushan on the second day?

The king seeks Esther's further desires.

The king was informed how many people had been killed in the citadel of Shushan (see v6). He then informed Esther of this and of the death of the ten sons of Haman. At that point he did not know how many had been killed elsewhere, but he wondered how many there would be if this many had been killed in the citadel alone.

He then asked Esther what else she would like to have done. Whatever further request she had, he was still willing to grant it.

A decree for another day of slaughter

Esther's response was: first, she sought yet another day for the Jews to fight against their enemies; but this applied just in Shushan the citadel, not throughout the empire as had been the case on the first day. We are not told exactly why she made this request. Perhaps she had heard already of some of the Jews' enemies who had escaped the first day of slaughter. This would seem to make it clear that the Jews did not just kill those who attacked them, but they took aggression against their enemies. If not so, then why seek another day of fighting?

Second, she wanted the ten sons of Haman to be hung on a gallows. Though they were dead, they would be hung even as Haman had been and as he had sought to do to Mordecai. The king agreed to this request too, so the ten sons of Haman were hung on a gallows. Again, we are not told exactly why she made this request. The sons were already dead. The only purpose I can think of was to make a public display to warn potential enemies of the Jews to not seek to harm the Jews as Haman had.

The second day of slaughter followed by rest

Verse 16

8. What did the Jews in the rest of the provinces do? How many died?

The Jews in Shushan continued to slaughter their enemies.

As had been decreed, the Jews in Shushan (not the rest of the empire) gathered on the 14th day of Adar and continued to slaughter their enemies as they had on the 13th day of the month. The first day they had killed 500 enemies, but this time they killed 300 more. And once again we are told that they took no plunder (see on v10).

The results of the slaughter elsewhere in the empire

The Jews in the other provinces had been told to fight their enemies only on the 13th day of the month (see v17). So, whereas the Jews in Shushan were still fighting their enemies on the 14th day, the Jews elsewhere in the empire rested on that day.

But we are told that, altogether, 75,000 enemies of the Jews had been slain around the empire. Nevertheless, again the Jews did not take plunder for themselves.

Verses 17,18

9. What days were involved for conflict and rest in the empire? How did this differ from the days for the Jews in Shushan?

The days of rest described

These verses clarify the timing of the events. V17 shows that the Jews throughout the empire killed the 75,000 enemies on the 13th day of the month Adar, as per the decree. Then they rested on the 14th day of the month. The Jews in Shushan had fought on both the 13th and the 14th days, so they rested on the 15th day.

So the 14th day was a day of feasting and rejoicing for Jews throughout the empire, and the 15th day was a day of feasting and rejoicing for the Jews in Shushan. The rest of the chapter then describes how this led to an annual feast for the Jews.

Surely this became a great victory for the Jews. The beginning of the story gave cause for fear that the Jews everywhere might be destroyed. By the end of the story, however, the Jews had won a great victory over their enemies.

Feast of Purim Instituted – 9:19-32

Verses 19-25

10. What proclamation did Mordecai make for the Jews? What did the Jews do on those days?

The 14th and 15th days of Adar established as holidays

The fourteenth day of the month of Adar was celebrated as a holiday for feasting and gladness and for sending presents to one another. But since the Jews in Shushan had celebrated on the 15th day of the month, both the 14th and 15th days came to be celebrated as an annual holiday among the Jews.

Mordecai wrote letters to all the Jews throughout the empire of the king that they should establish these two days as an annual celebration. These days had been planned as a day of defeat of the Jews leading to sorrow and mourning, but instead they became days of rest from their enemies. So they were set up as an annual remembrance on which the people would feast, rejoice, and send presents to one another and gifts to the poor.

A memorial to the victory Esther achieved over Haman

As we have read, Haman had plotted to annihilate all the Jews, but Esther had influenced the king to bring about the fall of Haman and ultimately the death of all his sons. So Haman's plot ended up turning against him. The Jews accepted the decree of Mordecai as a custom in which they remembered this event each year.

Haman had determined this date by the cast of the Pur – i.e., the lot – see on 3:6,7. We will see that this led to the name of the annual feast.

Verses 26-32

11. What was the feast called, and what did it commemorate?

The feast designated Purim

Because Haman had determined these days by casting the Pur or the lot (v24), the Jews then named the annual holiday Purim. They imposed this day on themselves and their descendants as

an annual holiday to be celebrated without fail in these two days every year. The days were to be remembered by every family in every city and province in every generation. This was to insure that the memory of these events would be established and would never perish among the Jews.

Esther confirms the feast of Purim

Esther then wrote a letter, in addition to the one Mordecai had written, to confirm the celebration of the feast. She had full authority (apparently as queen) to do so. Mordecai then sent letters to the Jews throughout all the provinces of the empire about this.

So the feast of Purim was confirmed and decreed to all Jews and their descendants. This was also then recorded in a book (perhaps the chronicles of the kings of Persia). This feast is still kept today, still called the feast of Purim, in the month of March.

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