

**BIBLE STUDY ON ESTHER**  
**February 13, 2019**

**Esther 8:1-2**

These two verses conclude the events of a very busy day.  
It all started with the king not being able to sleep one night.  
Finally, the relationship between Esther and Mordecai is made public.  
Ahasuerus gives to Esther all the belongings of Haman.  
Still impulsive, Ahasuerus gives his signet ring to Mordecai (confers royal power to him).  
Esther also assigns Mordecai to be the overseer of Haman's property.  
It is important to remember that he receives his position and wealth because of Esther.  
In some versions of the story it emphasizes the elevated status of women.

Verses also demonstrate a pivotal point in the story.  
Greatest reversal has just taken place.  
Happy ending has been achieved, the villain is dead, and the hero has been rewarded.  
All could live happily ever after except the story continues.  
Character of the king is not changed (he did not admit wrongdoing or responsibility).  
Esther and Mordecai are triumphant but still dependent on the whim of Ahasuerus.  
Jews are still under threat because once a law is in place it is irrevocable.

**Esther 8:3-8**

Esther is again the principal actor and Mordecai says nothing this whole time.  
We are to note that Esther has no trouble bowing before the king.  
Indicates that Mordecai's refusal to bow before Haman was personal.  
Esther weeps which is the first sign of emotion she has shown in the story.  
All of the verbs used indicate the severity of the situation.  
Even with Haman gone the Jews are in danger as long as the edict is still in force.  
Esther is the only one who can make the king act to avert the danger.

Esther speaks in such a way as to indicate this would be a personal favor (a sign of his affection).  
We are to note that she does not implore on the basis of what is morally right.  
Once more we see the expression – *Let an order be written*.  
It separates the king from any personal responsibility.  
Esther is doing exactly what Haman did earlier.  
King should foil the plot of Haman in order to avoid personal pain for his queen.

King points out that Haman was hanged because he set his hand against the Jews.  
However, this is not the reason given for the execution of Haman in 7:8.  
Ahasuerus would like to think the problem is solved since Haman is dead.  
Unfortunately the original edict is irrevocable.  
He turns over complete responsibility to Esther.  
Esther and Mordecai are to remedy the situation.  
He gives them permission to write a new command in his name and seal it with his ring.  
Dilemma: If Haman's decree is irrevocable, how will the Jews be saved?



Outside of the city of Susa, the Jews rejoice with feasting and a holiday.  
Many *professed* to be Jews because they were afraid.  
We again have a sense that the story is over.  
Scholars have raised the possibility that the original form ended here.

### **Esther 9:1-5**

Action is now set on the thirteenth day of Adar (day appointed by Haman to destroy the Jews).  
Tables have turned on the enemies of the Jews.  
Enemies of the Jews hope to dominate them but that has changed.  
Jews gather against those who would attack them and no one could hold the Jews back.  
Action seems more aggressive than defensive.  
Their fear is political since Mordecai has now become second in command in the kingdom.  
It is important not to see these verses as a reflection of an actual historical event.  
It is a wishful thinking of an oppressed minority (Psalm 137).  
Focus is to be on the victory and not the slaughter.  
Jews did not seek violence but it found them.  
Jews moved from being a fearful and mourning people to a powerful and feared people.  
Jews also became the image of Esther.  
She changed from a silent, pliable girl into a strong and decisive woman.

### **Esther 9:6-10**

Back in 8:15 we are told that the city of Susa rejoiced with Mordecai.  
Jews still found 500 men to slaughter.  
Likely they found hostility among the friends and family of Haman.  
We have recorded the ten sons of Haman.  
Principle of retributive justice applies – the children share in the punishment of the father.  
Also possible that in the nine months the sons attempted to carry out the first decree.

Jews took no plunder in spite of the fact that they had permission to do so.  
It was outlined in the first decree (3:13).  
It is also in sharp contrast to what Saul did in his battle with Agag and the Amalekites.  
No Jewish losses are mentioned and nothing is attributed to God.

### **Esther 9:11-15**

King receives accurate information about what is happening in his kingdom.  
For the first time he takes the initiative.  
He reports to Esther the 500 dead and the killing of the ten sons of Haman.  
King then asks Esther for her petition and request and promises to give it to her.  
Whole exchange seems redundant.

Response from Esther is also unexpected.  
Feeling more confident and secure in her position she asks the slaughter continue a second day.  
Corpses of the sons of Haman are to be put on public display.  
Public exposure of a corpse is the ultimate degradation in the Hebrew tradition.  
King does exactly what Esther asks and another 300 men are slaughtered.  
Again the emphasis is placed on the fact that they took no plunder.

Request for a second day is meant to line up with the two-day *Festival of Purim*. It also explains why the Jews celebrate on the 15<sup>th</sup> rather than the 14<sup>th</sup> of Adar.

### **Esther 9:16-19**

Reason for the fighting on the 13<sup>th</sup> of Adar was self-defense.  
Huge number who died implies the widespread anti-Semitism that lurked in the provinces.  
For the fourth time the author emphasizes that the Jews took no spoils.

We now enter into the celebration of the *Festival of Purim*.  
Rejoicing that accompanied these feasts contrasts with the mourning that occurred earlier.  
Jews were to send portions of food to one another.  
It recalls the special portion that Hegai gave to Esther after she wins his favor in 2:9.  
In keeping with the rest of the book it is a seemingly secular festival.  
Rest from fighting is celebrated and the emphasis is not because of their victory.  
It is safety and not the slaughter that is celebrated.

### **Esther 9:20-32**

Purpose of the letters written by Mordecai and Esther is to establish the *Festival of Purim*.  
It is one of several festivals celebrated in contemporary Judaism not legislated in the Torah.  
Closest comparison to Purim is Hanukkah (celebrates victory over the Seleucids).  
But Hanukkah commemorates an actual event in Jewish history.  
Author solves the problem by artificially tying the *Festival of Purim* with these letters.

Mordecai writes in his own name rather than in the name of the king.  
Mordecai is taking a bold step in inaugurating a new Jewish holiday.  
Mordecai does not write to begin an annual celebration but to confirm one that is taking place.  
He seems to be requesting that all Jews everywhere celebrate both days.  
Reason is that the Jews had rest and a reversal of fortune.  
Salvation was to be celebrated and not the slaughter of their enemies.  
Added petition was to give to the poor (also in the celebration of Rosh Hashanah).  
No mention of this being an overtly religious practice.  
Jews confirmed the holiday by accepting what they had already begun to do.  
We should note that the king (rather than Esther) is given credit for foiling the scheme.

We seem to have a separate letter from Queen Esther.  
She writes with full authority to establish what Mordecai could only request.  
Esther gives orders that the days of Purim be observed, mandating a two-day festival.  
She has made her last appearance in the story.

### **Esther 10:1-3**

Verses more than likely added on to give the story a more fitting conclusion.  
Verses point to the greatness of Mordecai and the king.  
Mordecai uses his wealth for the benefit of his people.  
Here is another parallel with the story of Joseph who saved all of Egypt from famine.  
Mordecai becomes the living example of a wise ruler.

## **Purim in Israel**

Women are to attend the reading of the Megillah because women were also part of the miracle. Esther is the one through whom the miraculous deliverance of the Jews was accomplished. Women were also threatened by the genocide decree and therefore equal partners in the miracle. The reader is to pronounce the names of the ten sons of Haman in one breath. It indicates their simultaneous death. Megillah is read with a traditional chant different from the customary reading of the Torah. In addition the rabbi could read the story of the attack on the Jews by Amalek.

Most Orthodox communities do not allow women to lead the Megillah reading. Rabbinic authorities also state that women should not read it for themselves. However they have an obligation to hear it read. If men or women could not attend the synagogue the Megillah should be read to them in private. Any male over the age of thirteen could read it to them. In some Orthodox communities there is a special public reading only for women. Megillah is still read by a man.

Modern Orthodox leaders allow women to serve as public Megillah readers. Women can only read for other women.



Name of Haman occurs 54 times in the reading of the Megillah. Custom developed of writing the name of Haman on two smooth stones. Throughout the reading the stones would be knocked together until the name was blotted out. Some wrote the name of Haman on the soles of their shoes. Some rabbis object to the excessive noise so use a ratchet in the synagogue.

On Purim Day, a festival meal called the Se'udat Purim is held. There is a long standing custom of drinking wine at the feast. Custom stems from a statement in the Talmud. Drink until you can no longer distinguish between *Cursed is Haman* and *Blessed is Mordecai*. Drinking of wine simulates spiritual blindness (cannot distinguish between good from evil).

Custom of masquerading in costume and the wearing of masks originated with Italian Jews. It followed the example of Roman carnivals at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It is a way of emulating God who disguised his presence behind natural events. Purim in Israel is perhaps one of the most spectacular holidays in the world. Thousands of people take to the streets showing off their costumes. Costumes for Purim are a special industry in Israel.

### **In Times of War**

Adolf Hitler banned and forbade the observance of Purim. In a speech on November 10, 1938, Streicher surmised that just as the Jews *butchered* 75,000 Persians in one night, the same fate would have befallen the German people had the Jews succeeded in inciting a war against Germany. The Jews would have instituted a new Purim festival in Germany.

Nazi attacks against Jews were often coordinated with Jewish festivals. On Purim 1942 ten Jews were hanged to *avenge* the hanging of Haman's ten sons. In a similar incident in 1943, the Nazis shot ten Jews from the ghetto.

In an apparent connection made by Hitler between his Nazi regime and the role of Haman, Hitler stated in a speech made on January 30, 1944, that if the Nazis were defeated then the Jews could celebrate a *second Purim*. Streicher was heard to sarcastically remark *Purimfest 1946* as he ascended the scaffold after Nuremberg.

One scholar notes that ten Nazi defendants in the Nuremberg trials were executed by hanging on October 16, 1946, which was the date of the final judgment day of Judaism (Hoshana Rabbah). An eleventh Nazi official sentenced to death committed suicide (parallel to Haman's daughter).

### **Coming Up**

Ash Wednesday – March 6  
Services at 12:00 pm and 7:30 pm

Wednesday Evening Worship – March 13, 20, 27 and April 3, 10  
Services at 7:30 pm

Future Bible Study (Letter to the Galatians)  
Spring Bible Study Series – May 1, 8, 15, 22

