

ESTHER

Chapter 8

Esther Saves the Jews

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. 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, Esther rose and stood before the king. 5 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." 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. 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.

8:1–17 The author achieves considerable literary symmetry by recapitulating much of 3:1–4:3 in almost identical terms. (CSB)

8:1 *gave Queen Esther the house of Haman.* Herodotus (3.128–129) and Josephus (*Antiquities*, 11.17) confirm that the property of a traitor reverted to the crown; Xerxes presents Haman’s wealth (5:11) to Esther. (CSB)

Typical that the property of an executed criminal would be confiscated and awarded to someone else. (TLSB)

Esther had told what he was to her. Ahasuerus finally learned of the relationship between his queen and Mordecai. (TLSB)

8:2 Cf. 3:10, where the king’s offer of his ring includes Haman’s keeping the money; here Mordecai receives the office and the estate of Haman. (CSB)

signet ring. The king’s signet ring authorized Mordecai to sign royal edicts, a power that had previously been granted to Haman. (TLSB)

over the house of Haman. Further evidence that Mordecai had replaced Haman. Ambr: “That commendable friendship which maintains virtue is to be preferred most certainly to wealth, or honours, or power. It is not wont to be preferred to virtue indeed, but to follow after it” (*NPNF* 2 10:87). (TLSB)

8:3–6 Esther and Mordecai are secure (7:4–5), but the irrevocable decree is still a threat to the rest of the Jews. (CSB)

8:3 *fell at his feet and wept and pleaded.* Esther’s plea, accompanied by emotional gestures, was intended to move the king to be merciful to the Judeans. (TLSB)

pleaded. Same Hbr word was used in 4:8, when Mordecai asked Esther to approach the king on behalf of her people. (TLSB)

avert the evil plan of Haman. Haman was dead, but his edict lived on (3:12–15). (TLSB)

8:5 *If it please the king.* Esther prefaced her previous request to the king with similar conditional phrases (7:3) but here adds two more. (TLSB)

revoke the letters devised by Haman. Esther asked Ahasuerus to nullify Haman’s decree, which had gone out in the king’s name. (TLSB)

8:6 *calamity.* Lit, “evil.” (TLSB)

my people?... my kindred? Esther unabashedly identified herself with the Judeans. (TLSB)

destruction. Lit, “perishing.” (TLSB)

8:7 *Mordecai the Jew.* Mordecai’s Judean heritage is emphasized emphasized (cf 5:13). (TLSB)

he intended to lay hands on the Jews. Actually, Ahasuerus had initially ordered Haman’s execution because of his perceived attack on the queen (7:8–10). (TLSB)

8:8 The dilemma is the same as the one that confronted Darius the Mede in Daniel (Da 6:8, 12, 15). The solution is to issue another decree that in effect counters the original decree of Haman without formally revoking it. (CSB)

you may write as you please. Previously Haman had held that right (3:11). (TLSB)

edict ... cannot be revoked. Though it was impossible for the Persian king to rescind any decree that had gone out in his name, issuing a second decree countered the effects of the first. (TLSB)

8:9–13 The phraseology is taken from the parallel in 3:12–14. The extent of the destruction is the same as that earlier decreed against Amalek. (CSB)

8:9 *twenty-third day ... third month.* In Xerxes's 12th year, i.e., June 25, 474 B.C., two months and ten days after the proclamation of Haman's edict. (CSB)

Second decree was issued 70 days after the first (3:12). *each ... language.* Scribes had to translate the edict in the languages of the 127 provinces of the Persian Empire. *also to the Jews ... language.* Edict was translated in Hbr, indicating that the Judeans had retained their own language. (TLSB)

8:11 *to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate* – The same words as in Haman's decree: therefore the Jews had as much authority to slay their enemies, as their enemies had to slay them. – It is shocking to us that the decree authorized the killing of women and children. But this decree was merely following the basic principle of Near Eastern justice, which is also recognized in the Mosaic law, "an eye for an eye" (Deut 19:21). This decree authorized the Jews to use the exact measures which Haman's decree, recorded in chapter 4, had granted to their enemies. Both sides in the conflict were now put on equal terms. (PBC)

Every element in Haman's decree (3:13) had its counterpoint in the edict issued by Mordecai. (TLSB)

to gather and defend their lives. Haman's decree had stated that the Persians were to attack the Judeans, who were now permitted to counterattack in defense. (TLSB)

Mordecai used Haman's wording with one significant difference: the Judeans would be fighting in self-defense, not as aggressors determined to kill. (TLSB)

children and women included. Judean women and children who might be attacked. (TLSB)

plunder their goods. Haman had authorized plunder of the condemned people, and Mordecai gave that same permission to his people. However, the Judeans did not plunder the possessions of their enemies. (TLSB)

8:12 Time limit was set so that the killing would not go on indefinitely. (TLSB)

thirteenth day ... twelfth month. Mar. 7, 473 B.C. (see 3:13). Some 15 years after this first Purim, Ezra would lead his expedition to Jerusalem (Ezr 7:9). (CSB)

The original day chosen by lot for the destruction of the Judeans (see notes, 3:7, 13). (TLSB)

8:13 *take vengeance on their enemies.* Concept of revenge was deeply rooted in the ancient biblical world and also recognized in Mosaic Law (Dt 19:21: “life for life, eye for eye”; cf 1Ki 2:31). Mordecai permitted the Judeans to retaliate against enemies who would seek to harm them. Remember that Esther and Mordecai’s first choice was simply to revoke Haman’s edict, which Ahasuerus could not do. (TLSB)

8:15 *royal robes.* After Haman’s edict, Mordecai had “put on sackcloth and ashes” (4:1). Now, he dressed in royal clothing, because the previous situation was completely reversed. (TLSB)

great golden crown. Mordecai was second only to the king. (TLSB)

city of Susa shouted and rejoiced. Earlier, the inhabitants of Susa were “thrown into confusion” (3:15) by the edict against the Judeans. Now, they were exultant. (TLSB)

8:16 Mourning, fasting, weeping, and lamenting (4:3) were replaced by celebration among the Judeans. This verse is still recited in synagogue services to mark the end of the Sabbath. (TLSB)

8:17 *feast.* The eighth reference to a banquet or feast. (TLSB)

declared themselves Jews. People of the land identified with the Judeans, not by converting to faith in Yahweh, but by siding with the Judeans in an ethnic sense. (TLSB)

fear of the Jews had fallen on them. People were afraid to attack the Judeans because they knew the Judeans would fight back and defeat them. (TLSB)

Ch 8 King Ahasuerus gives Mordecai permission to issue a decree that countermands Haman’s decree. The Judeans are given the right to defend themselves if attacked and so take vengeance on their enemies. Self-defense is not forbidden in Scripture, but Jesus has overturned the law of revenge for believers (cf Mt 5:38–39). Leave vengeance to the Lord and the governing officials, who are called to administer justice (Rm 12:19; 13:3–4). If God would deal with us as our sins deserve, we would all be destroyed in hell. But the holy God has reversed the decree of eternal death against us because of His Son’s sacrifice on the cross. His love for us moves us to love even our enemies (Mt 5:44). • Lord God, You have issued a decree of deliverance for me. Cause the joy and gladness in my heart to shine forth every day in my words and actions as I share this good news with others. Amen. (TLSB)