

Esther 8
September 19, 2021

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Do you believe that Jews today are still being persecuted? If yes, what have you observed that leads you to believe that? [Let people engage]

- The Holocaust is an obvious one;
- A mass shooting that has been called the worst anti-Semitic attack in U.S. history: Robert Bowers allegedly killed 10 members of the *Tree of Life Synagogue* in Pittsburgh, PA on 2018-OCT-27;
- The Temple Beth El building, but not the sanctuary, was heavily damaged[7] in an arson attack on 13 October 2000;
- Firebombing of a New York synagogue (Conservative Synagogue Adath Israel of Riverdale), 2000 New York terror attack;
- Beth Israel Synagogue (Edmonton) is firebombed 10.31.2000
- In 2002 Massive European wave of attacks on Jews and Jewish institutions between March and May, with largest number of attacks occurring in France;
- 2020, mid-May Tomb of Esther and Mordechai in Hamadan, Iran subjected to arson attack.
- 2020, August 24 Jewish Center at the University of Delaware subjected to an arson attack
- 2020, November Six Igbo synagogues in Nigeria are razed by soldiers. At least 50 people were killed during the siege.
- 2020, December 30 Congregation Beth Israel in northwest Portland, Oregon was subjected to an arson attack.

Transition: Anti-Semitism is still a big issue today, but we need to know with assurance that God is still in the business of protecting His chosen people. The Book of **Esther** is an opportunity for us to see how God is sovereign in the affairs of this world and WORKS AGAINST anti-Semitism. He PROTECTS His people and TURNS THE TABLES against those who wish to harm them. Not only did God DELIVER His chosen people from Haman, but He allowed Esther and Mordecai to receive great favor from King Xerxes who supported them to reverse the persecution that was originally established by Haman. Let's read Chapter 8 to see how this story unfolds.

BOOK:

The King's Edict in Behalf of the Jews

8 That same day King Xerxes gave Queen Esther the estate of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came into the presence of the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her. ²The king took off his signet ring, which he had reclaimed from Haman, and presented it to Mordecai. And Esther appointed him over Haman's estate.

³ Esther again pleaded with the king, falling at his feet and weeping. She begged him to put an end to the evil plan of Haman the Agagite, which he had devised against the Jews. ⁴ Then the king extended the gold scepter to Esther and she arose and stood before him.

⁵ “If it pleases the king,” she said, “and if he regards me with favor and thinks it the right thing to do, and if he is pleased with me, let an order be written overruling the dispatches that Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, devised and wrote to destroy the Jews in all the king’s provinces. ⁶ For how can I bear to see disaster fall on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?”

⁷ King Xerxes replied to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, “Because Haman attacked the Jews, I have given his estate to Esther, and they have hanged him on the gallows. ⁸ Now write another decree in the king’s name in behalf of the Jews as seems best to you, and seal it with the king’s signet ring—for no document written in the king’s name and sealed with his ring can be revoked.”

⁹ At once the royal secretaries were summoned—on the twenty-third day of the third month, the month of Sivan. They wrote out all Mordecai’s orders to the Jews, and to the satraps, governors and nobles of the 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush. These orders were written in the script of each province and the language of each people and also to the Jews in their own script and language. ¹⁰ Mordecai wrote in the name of King Xerxes, sealed the dispatches with the king’s signet ring, and sent them by mounted couriers, who rode fast horses especially bred for the king.

¹¹ The king’s edict granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves; to destroy, kill and annihilate any armed force of any nationality or province that might attack them and their women and children; and to plunder the property of their enemies. ¹² The day appointed for the Jews to do this in all the provinces of King Xerxes was the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar. ¹³ A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.

¹⁴ The couriers, riding the royal horses, raced out, spurred on by the king’s command. And the edict was also issued in the citadel of Susa.

¹⁵ Mordecai left the king’s presence wearing royal garments of blue and white, a large crown of gold and a purple robe of fine linen. And the city of Susa held a joyous celebration. ¹⁶ For the Jews it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honor. ¹⁷ In every province and in every city, wherever the edict of the king went, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating. And many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn’t understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Just as God continues to protect His chosen people, we need to align with Him and do our part to come against anti-Semitism and stand with our Jewish neighbors. As a point of interest, in 2003:

The [Southern Baptist Convention](#) passed a resolution "On Anti-Semitism" stating in part:
"RESOLVED, That the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, June 17–18, 2003, denounce all forms of anti-Semitism as contrary to the teachings of our Messiah and an assault on the revelation of Holy Scripture; and be it further

"RESOLVED, That we affirm to Jewish people around the world that we stand with them against any harassment that violates our historic commitments to religious liberty and human dignity; and be it finally

"RESOLVED, That we call on governmental and religious leaders across the world to stand against all forms of bigotry, hatred, or persecution."

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Be Committed* (p. 144). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Haman was dead, but his murderous edict was still very much alive. Long after wicked people are gone, the consequences of their evil words and deeds live on. Even today, innocent people are suffering because of guilty people who lie in their graves.

Unless something intervened, within nine months the Persians would attack the Jews and wipe them off the face of the earth. There were about 15 million Jews among the estimated 100 million people in the empire. Therefore, the odds were definitely against God's people. Of course, God's people have always been a minority; and "one with God is a majority." The Lord

had brought Esther and Mordecai to the kingdom “for such a time as this,” and they were prepared to act.

1. The promotion of Mordecai (Es. 8:1–2, 15)

According to the ancient historians, whenever a traitor was executed, the throne appropriated his property. Had Ahasuerus confiscated Haman’s property for himself, he would have acquired a great deal of wealth; but he chose to give Haman’s estate to Esther. More than an act of generosity, this gift was probably the king’s way of atoning for his foolish decisions that had brought so much pain to Esther and her people. It’s possible that Esther later shared some of this great wealth with the Jews so they could prepare themselves for the coming crisis.

Ahasuerus knew that both Esther and Mordecai were Jews, but now he was to learn that they were also cousins. Ahasuerus and Mordecai were relatives by marriage! When Haman was deposed, the king took back his royal ring (3:10), the insignia of the authority of the throne (8:8, 10; 3:12), and he gave the ring to Mordecai, making him prime minister. With a Jewish queen and a Jewish prime minister in the palace, the Jews in the empire were in a better political position than ever before.

Esther gave the management of Haman’s vast estate into the hands of Mordecai, who had first opposed Haman and refused to bow down. Were it not for Mordecai’s courage and encouragement of Esther, Haman would still be in control. “Wait on the Lord, and keep His way, and He shall exalt you to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, you shall see it. I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a native green tree. Yet he passed away, and behold, he was no more” (Ps. 37:34–36, NKJV).

The king made sure that Mordecai had a uniform worthy of his office, and it’s described in Esther 8:15. No longer did Mordecai wear old borrowed robes (6:7–11) but new robes prepared especially for him. The official royal colors were blue and white (see 1:6). The golden “crown” was probably a large turban which, along with the robe of white and purple, identified Mordecai as an important man of great authority.

Everything that Haman had acquired from the king by his scheming, Mordecai received as gifts, because Mordecai was a deserving man. At the beginning of this story, Esther and Mordecai were hardly exemplary in the way they practiced their religious faith; but now we get the impression that things have changed. Both of them have affirmed their Jewish nationality and both were the means of calling all the Jews in the empire to prayer and fasting. In one sense, they spearheaded a Jewish “revival” and made being Jewish a more honorable thing in the empire.

God doesn’t always give this kind of a “happy ending” to everybody’s story. Today, not all faithful Christians are promoted and given special honors. Some of them get fired because of their stand for Christ! God hasn’t promised that we’ll be promoted and made rich, but He has assured us that He’s in control of all circumstances and that He will write the last chapter of the story. If God doesn’t promote us here on earth, He certainly will when we get to glory.

2. Esther’s petition (Es. 8:3–6)

Wealth, prestige, and personal security could never satisfy Esther so long as her people were still in danger. To her, the most important thing in life was not her comfort but their deliverance; and she couldn’t rest until the matter was settled. How unlike some believers today who ignore the needs of a lost world while they search for new ways to spend money and have fun! They think that attending church and bringing their offerings fulfills their Christian responsibilities and gives

them the freedom to do whatever they please with the rest of their time and money. We need more people like Esther whose burden for condemned people was greater than any other thing in her life.

Years ago, in a Youth for Christ late-night prayer meeting, I heard attorney Jacob Stam pray, “Lord, the only thing most of us know about sacrifice is how to spell the word.” I never forgot that statement, and I confess that it sometimes still haunts me. I recall another YFC staff meeting at which the late Bill Carle sang “So Send I You,” and the Spirit of God brought all of us to our knees in prayer with a new dedication to help reach the world for Christ.

Esther couldn’t do everything, but she could do something; and what she could do, she did. She approached the throne of the king and asked him to reverse the edict that Haman had devised. *It was her interceding at the throne that saved the people of Israel from slaughter.* She was asking nothing for herself, except that the king save her people and deliver her from the heavy burden on her heart.

As I’ve studied the Scriptures, I’ve been impressed with the many people who have prayed for the Jews. When Israel sinned, Moses met God on the mountain and interceded for them (Ex. 32). He was even willing for God to blot him out of the Book of Life if that’s what it took to rescue the nation. Centuries later, the Apostle Paul said he was willing to be “accursed from Christ” if it would help save unbelieving Israel (Rom. 9:1–3, KJV).

On Mount Carmel, Elijah prayed for disobedient Israel (1 Kings 18); and in the palace, Nehemiah prayed for the Jews in Jerusalem (Neh. 1). Like Nehemiah, Ezra wept and prayed and asked God to help His sinful people (Ezra 9); and Daniel humbled himself and fasted and prayed that he might understand what God’s plan was for Israel (Dan. 9). “I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem, who shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the Lord, do not keep silent, and give Him no rest till He establishes and till He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth” (Isa. 62:6–7, NKJV).

“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper who love thee” (Ps. 122:6, KJV). There can be no peace in this world until there is peace in Jerusalem, and there can be no peace in Jerusalem unless God’s people obey this command and pray, “Thy kingdom come.”

“It was a master stroke of the Devil when he got the church and the ministry so generally to lay aside the mighty weapon of prayer,” wrote evangelist R.A. Torrey in *How to Obtain Fullness of Power in Christian Life and Service*. “The Devil is perfectly willing that the church should multiply its organizations and its deftly-contrived machinery for the conquest of the world for Christ, if it will only give up praying” (*Sword of the Lord* reprint, p. 59).

Esther’s example encourages us 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. *One concerned person devoted to prayer can make a great difference in this world, for prayer is the key that releases the power of God.* “Yet you do not have because you do not ask” (James 4:2, NKJV).

3. The king’s proclamation (Es. 8:7–17)

The problem Esther and Mordecai faced was that the king, simply by executive fiat, 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, and the supreme court of the land can even declare laws unconstitutional; but 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.

The king couldn't legally revoke his edict, but he could issue a new decree that would favor the Jews. The 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. 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.

Since Mordecai was now prime minister, it was his job to draft the new decree. What he did was give the Jews permission to defend themselves against anybody who tried to kill them and take their property. There were many people in the empire like Haman, who hated the Jews, wanted to destroy them, and get their hands on their wealth. The new decree allowed the Jews to assemble and defend themselves, but they were not allowed to be the aggressors.

Scholars don't agree on the translation of verse 11. The *Authorized Version* gives the impression that the edict allowed the Jews to destroy the wives and children of their attackers and plunder their spoil, and the NASB seems to agree with this interpretation. 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. I prefer the NIV translation.

If you read 3:11–13, you will see the similarity of the wording of the two decrees. Mordecai used the "official language" of the government, because legal statements must be expressed in legal language. This language may seem strange to outsiders, but without it we would have confusion and misinterpretation. You can't write the law the way you write a poem or a recipe.

According to 8:9, the new edict was written on the twenty-third day of the third month, which on our calendar would be June 25, 474 B.C. (Remember, the Jewish calendar begins with the month of April.) The first decree was issued on April 17 (3:12). Thus, about seventy days had passed since Haman had declared war on the Jews. "D Day" for the Jews was March 7 (3:13). Therefore, the people had about eight months to get ready.

We must pause and consider whether it was really ethical for Mordecai to give the Jews the authority to kill and loot. 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." Imagine worshiping a god that commanded the slaughter of whole populations!

First, let's 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. Do these critics approve of the *king's* edict? I certainly hope not! Well, 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? Better that Haman's decree had never been issued; but since it was published, better that Mordecai disarmed it by issuing his decree.

Now, let's look at the record in chapter 9, where you discover three important facts: The Jews killed only those who attacked them; they killed only the men (9:6, 12, 15); and they didn't lay hands on the loot, although they had the right to do so (vv. 10, 15–16). The fact that the Jews killed 800 men in the city of Shushan alone (vv. 6, 15) proves that there were many Persians just waiting for the opportunity to attack God's people. (It's estimated that there were probably half a million people in the capital city.)

The total number of the slain was 75,000 (v. 16) out of a population of perhaps 100 million people. But the fact that more than 75,000 people were prepared to slaughter *defenseless* Jews shows how many of the king's people hated God's people. And the fact that these people were even willing to attack *when they knew the Jews would protect themselves* is proof that anti-

Semitism was very strong throughout the empire. The critics say it was wrong for the Jews to kill 75,000 would-be murderers. Would it have been better if the 75,000 Persians had killed ten times as many Jews?

Mordecai's decree was in complete harmony with God's covenant with Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you" (Gen. 12:3, NKJV). Isaac also would have agreed with Mordecai; for when Isaac blessed Jacob, he said, "Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be those who bless you" (27:29, NKJV). In addition, God promised Moses, "I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries" (Ex. 23:22, NKJV). 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."

It's one thing to write a liberating new edict and quite another thing to get the message out to the people. 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. The couriers "hastened" because they were "pressed on by the king's commandment" (Es. 8:14, KJV). The NIV translates it "spurred 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!

Ever since the fall of Adam, "the law of sin and of death" has been in force in this world (Rom. 8:2; 5:12–21); *and God will not rescind that law*. The wages of sin is still death (Rom. 6:23). Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God put another law into effect, "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (8:2). God obeyed the law of sin and death when He gave His Son Jesus to bear our sins and die on the cross. But then God raised Him from the dead and put a new decree into effect that makes it possible for sinners to be saved. Now He wants us to put that good news into every tongue and take that good news to every nation.

This chapter begins with Queen Esther in tears (Es. 8:3), but it ends with the Jews rejoicing and feasting (vv. 15–17). 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 Jews had been mourning and fasting, but now they were ecstatic with joy.

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 word that changed their lives. They had hope, joy, and peace because they had faith in what the prime minister said. "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" (Rom. 15:13, NKJV).

The statement that "many of the people of the land became Jews" (Es. 8:17, KJV) is variously interpreted. 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. They became what were known later as "God-fearers" or "worshippers of God" (Acts 10:2; 16:14; 18:7).

I think 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.

Martin, J. A. (1985). Nahum. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 711-712) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

C. Jews delivered, and took revenge (8:1–17)

God had sovereignly worked in various circumstances so that the Jews could be delivered. Now it was the Jews' turn. They would have to fight to retain what was theirs. They had to take part actively in their own deliverance. The Jewish people back in the land would also be encouraged to work hard and carry out their responsibilities before God in His sovereign plan.

1. MORDECAI RECEIVED ROYAL POSITION (8:1–2)

8:1–2. Apparently, **Haman** was considered a criminal, for his property was confiscated. The king's **signet ring**, which had been given **Haman** to authorize the edict against the Jews (3:10), was now given to **Mordecai**. Again, the tables turned against Haman, even after his death. For one thing **Mordecai** now had the power that Haman previously had. For another, Haman, who had hoped to confiscate the Jews' property (3:13), now had his own property removed and given to, of all people, **Esther**, who in turn **appointed** Mordecai to oversee it.

2. SECOND PROCLAMATION SENT OUT (8:3–14)

8:3–6. Since the edict to exterminate the Jews (3:13) was still in effect, something had to be done. So **Esther** appeared before **the king** a second time without an invitation (cf. 5:1–2). This time **she begged him to put an end to the evil plan** which was in effect because of **Haman**. **The king** was favorable toward her and once again held out **the gold scepter to her** (cf. 4:11; 5:2).

Esther's request was simple. She wanted a second decree written and sent out which would override the first decree. Again she was willing to be known as a Jewess for she spoke of **my people and my family** (cf. 7:3).

8:7–8. The **king** noted that **Esther** and **Mordecai** now had the power and resources that previously belonged to **Haman** and therefore they should use that power to their advantage. Though Haman’s decree could not be revoked, a second one could supersede it. Xerxes even gave Mordecai authority to **write** the **decree** any way he wished and to stamp it with **the king’s** authority by using his **signet ring** (cf. 3:10, 12; 8:2).

8:9–14. The decree Mordecai wrote was **sent** out in **the third month ... Sivan** (June–July) 474. Since this was a little over two months after Haman’s decree (3:12) the Jews had about nine months to prepare themselves for the conflict (up to the 13th day of the 12th month, the date Haman had chosen by lot; cf. 3:7, 13; 9:1). As was the case with the previous decree (cf. 3:12), this one too was dispatched (cf. 1:22; 3:15) by horsemen throughout the whole empire **from India to Cush** (cf. 1:1) and was **written in the** appropriate languages for **each province**. The edict gave **the Jews ... the right to protect themselves** and the right to **annihilate** (cf. 3:13; 7:4) and **plunder** any group that fought against them. **The Jews** could take away the property of **their enemies** as Mordecai had “taken away” the property of Haman.

3. JEWS REJOICED (8:15–17)

8:15–17. **Mordecai** wore clothes which told of his royal position—**royal garments ... a large crown**, and a **purple linen robe**. **Blue and white** were the Persian royal colors (cf. 1:6). He now held the position and status Haman had held (3:1). Previously under Haman’s edict the city of Susa had been “bewildered” (3:15). Now under the edict of Mordecai **the city of Susa held a joyous celebration**. And obviously **the Jews** were elated. Their rise to power caused **many** Gentiles to become Jewish proselytes. God’s good hand was then becoming obvious to the world at large. No longer were these events being viewed simply as happenstance; now people were beginning to realize that the God of **the Jews** was protecting them.

Mathews, K. A. (1998). The Historical Books. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (p. 197). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

THE KING’S DECREE (8:1–17)

This royal decree Mordecai wrote answered Haman’s evil decree (see 3:8–11). This parallelism continues the theme of reversal, the decree enabling the Jews to take the offensive against their enemies. The thirteenth of Adar, the day planned for the Jews’ destruction, was exchanged for the two-day celebration of Purim because of the Jews’ conquest.

Mordecai’s Plan (8:1–17). Rather than Jewish property falling into Haman’s hands (3:13b), Haman’s property and authority were given to Esther and Mordecai. But Haman’s villainous plot remained, and Esther successfully pleaded for the king’s assistance to avert the disaster. The decree Mordecai wrote gave the Jews the right to defend themselves.

Mordecai took Haman’s place as second to the king (8:15). Whereas the city of Susa was disturbed at Haman’s decree (3:15), Mordecai’s edict gladdened their hearts and converted some to the Jewish faith.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Es 8). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.