

A New Decree

Esther 8:3-17

We have already seen the reversal of fortune for Esther and Haman. Haman has been hung on the gallows that were intended for Mordecai. Mordecai, through Esther, has received the king's signet ring that was previously given to Haman. Esther has received the king's favor.

But it isn't over yet...

Most of what has occurred so far has been personal. It is not as if the Jewish people have not been mentioned. They have. Esther has openly sealed her fate with that of her people.

And yet, the king has not yet really addressed the issue of his previous edict to destroy the Jews. This edict has not yet been reversed. The Jews are still scheduled for termination. Previously, Mordecai had motivated Esther to take action by saying that she should not think that she would be exempt from the fate of her people. But things have now changed. At this point, Esther and Mordecai would themselves escape the judgment. They are now outside of the edict and would be free from harm. This freedom brings with it a new test. Will Esther and Mordecai still stand with their people now that they have the opportunity to escape with their own hide?

Read Esther 8:3-6.

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,

⁵ Esther rose and stood before the king.

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?"

Right off the bat, we can see that Esther is not out to save her own skin. She remains steadfast to fight to save her people. Esther will risk all that she has gained personally for herself and Mordecai to save her people.

Time has had to occur between the previous chapter and v. 3 of chapter 8. We don't know how much time. Probably not too long. But enough time for all of the feelings of fear to come back again.

Esther brings up the issue with the king. We must not forget that the king is a very volatile man. It is not a guarantee that he will continue to favor Esther. It looks that way, but it is not yet a done deal.

Esther weeps and falls at the feet of the king. This reaction is greater than her previous request. Before she maintained a certain royal demeanor. Now, she unashamedly falls at his feet weeping. This, in itself, is not really the way to approach a Persian king. If it were, she would most likely have done this before. It wasn't that she did not have these emotions before. She simply kept them in check. But now she lets her emotions flow.

Her plea now was that the King would avert the evil plan of Haman the Agagite. She does not mention the fact that it was the king's signature that was on the edict. Of course, both she and the king understand this fact. But it is not the sort of thing that she wants to draw his attention to.

The king once again holds out his golden scepter.
Esther once again has the favor of the king.
She rises and stands before him.
Her plea again rests upon the king's pleasure.

"If it please the king,

But notice how she sandwiches a new argument between statements of his pleasure in her.

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,

She already knows that the king has found pleasure in her. But she is concerned that this may not be enough for her people. He must rule not just for Esther. He must rule in favor of her people.

And so she hopes that her plea may “seem right” to him. We will see.

Read Esther 8:7-8.

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."

How are we to understand the King's response?

He responds both to Esther and to Mordecai and he specifically associates Mordecai as a Jew. I think this shows us that the king gets the issue. He understands what is going on. He understands the tension between his previous command and his present commitment to Esther and Mordecai.

The king next states what he has already done against Haman. I think he says this to let Esther and Mordecai know that he is truly sympathetic to their situation. He is on their side, so to speak. "I have given Esther the house of Haman 'because he intended to lay hands on the Jews.'"

But even though the king is personally on the side of Esther and Mordecai, granting Esther's request is more complicated. The king cannot (will not) simply revoke his previous edict. That would go against the protocol of Persian kings. The king would lose face before all of his people. He cannot simply send out a new edict stating that he made a mistake with the previous edict and was annulling it now. Persian Kings were to be next to divine. They did not make mistakes. So instead of reversing his previous edict, he does something that will work out even better, at least, in the end.

What does he say?

“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.”

In other words, I am giving you the authority to write up a new decree to deal with the problem. The only thing you cannot do is revoke my previous decree.

“For an edict written
in the name of the king
and sealed with the king's ring
cannot be revoked.”

But rest assured - this new edict will have the same authority that the previous edict has. It will be binding as well.

This reminds me of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. In this book, Lewis, rightly understands that God (Aslan) cannot (and will not) go back on his previous laws in order to save Edmund. But that does not mean that he will not save Edmund. He just will not do it breaking his previous laws.

Certainly, the Persian King could have repealed his law. But in some common grace way, they still understood that this would not be appropriate. I think they get this from the fact that God does not change. I don't want to push this too far, but I find it interesting that this whole situation does parallel what God has done for us in the gospel.

Romans 3:20-26 ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. ²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it- ²² the righteousness of God through

faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Read Esther 8:9.

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.

Why are we given the time?

- Timing is critical in God's providence.
- Haman's edict went out on the 13th Day of the First Month. (3:12)
- The date scheduled for the Jews termination was the 13th Day of the 12th Month.
- We see now that it is the 3rd Month and the 23rd Day. More than two months have passed since Haman's Edict.
- There is still time to get the word out of Mordecai's decree, but just barely.
 - o They could not send out a email or post the new decree on facebook.

“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.”

It is very important for us to take some time to understand this new edict:

1. Edict is written to the all the same people as Haman's edict, EXCEPT it now is also addressed to the Jews 'in their script and their language.'

It was written to the king's satraps and to the governors over all the provinces and to the officials of all the peoples, to every province in its own script and every people in its own language.

All people must know of the new edict, but especially God's people.

Read Esther 8:10

“¹⁰ And he wrote
in the name of King Ahasuerus
and sealed it with the king's signet ring.”

2. The Edict is written with the same authority as before.

“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,”

3. The Edict is sent on the king's swift horses to ensure the new Edict gets there in time.

Previously, no horses were mentioned. But now, two months have gone by and there is need for speed if the word of the edict is going to make it to all of the regions of the Persian empire.

- Letters were sent by couriers...

Read Esther 8:11-12.

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,
on one day throughout all the provinces of King
Ahasuerus,
on the thirteenth day
of the twelfth month,
which is the month of Adar.”

12

Ahasuerus,

4. The Contents of the Edict Itself

- a. Allowed to gather and defend themselves. Presumably, if they had tried to assemble before they would have been open to all the wrath of the empire.
- b. Allowed to destroy, kill, and annihilate any force that opposes them.
- c. Allowed to destroy, kill, and annihilate the women and children of these forces.
- d. Allowed to plunder their goods.
- e. On One Day - The same day as Haman’s Edict of Destruction.

The New Edict uses the precise wording of Haman’s Edict.

“To destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods.”

This is designed to emphasize the complete reversal of events. Haman wanted to destroy the Jews. All who would follow Haman to carry out this decree, would themselves be destroyed.

Haman is only the head and representative of all who would seek the destruction of God’s people.

There are people in our day who continue to want the physical destruction of God’s people. They will themselves be destroyed in the end.

But is it any different when forces in our land seek the destruction of biblical truth?

When someone promotes that the Bible is false or that its message of salvation is not true, are they not seeking to destroy God’s people. We are not

simply a physical people. We are a people who find their existence in the truth of God's Word.

When people seek to destroy that truth, they are just as guilty as Haman.

The Jews are given authority to defend themselves. This makes sense to us. We understand and accept our right to self-defense. But then the edict goes further. They are also given the right to destroy and kill and annihilate. We may be a bit more squeamish about this, but can probably swallow its pill. But then the Edict goes even further. The Jews have the right to destroy, kill and annihilate the women and children of all who oppose them.

Now, we struggle with this. How can we hold children to blame? What did they do?

This must be wrong. And remember, Mordecai is the one who authors the decree. Surely, he has gone too far. Surely, he has allowed his own personal hatred to move him to condemn innocent people.

Well, let's not be so hasty.

Although Scripture is clear that God will never condemn an innocent person to hell. And it is also clear that "ultimately" we all suffer God's judgment for our own guilt and sin before God. Scripture also is consistent throughout in making a connection between parents and children.

Adam was the representative of all men. The guilt of his sin is laid upon us all. When Achan sins by keeping some of the plunder from Jericho, his entire family is punished along with him. When God gives his Law on Mount Sinai, he affirms this connection between parents and children.

Exodus 20:5 ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me."

And whenever we have glimpses and foreshadows of the final judgment, women and children are always included.

Noah, and his children are saved in the ark during the flood. Outside the ark, women and children are destroyed. Joshua is told, when they are going into the Promised Land, to destroy all the Canaanites, including women and children: for their sins had reached their full limit and their time of judgment had come. And most importantly to our situation: Saul was told to kill all of the Amalekites for their pursuit of God's people in the wilderness.

So, even though I don't presume to understand fully all that God considers in his final judgment, I can safely say, that women and children are NOT innocent before him. Somehow, it is right for God to include them in his act of judgment.

I know that this will continue to be something that most of you will struggle with. I am more than willing to talk more with you about this.

But always remember in your wrestling that God's Word is the definition of truth. You are to live according to your conscience, but your conscience is to be informed by the Word of God. You do not sit in judgment on the Word. The Word always stands in judgment over you. If the Word cannot be trusted to lead us, then we are truly in darkness.

So, let us not forget that all who seek to destroy God's people are themselves under a decree from God of destruction. This principle is just as true today as in the days of the Old Testament. We do not have any authority in the present to "destroy, kill, or annihilate" anyone, but we are told that God will do this very thing to all who oppose us.

The exception to this is when God graciously chooses to redeem those who are his enemies - like he did with the Apostle Paul.

In a previous sermon, I made the statement that we were all Agagites at one time. This is true. We were all, in our sinful natures, enemies of God. I say this with the understanding that for many of you, God has been working in your heart to change you from a very young age. Some of you cannot remember a time where you did not believe in Christ and desire to walk with him. I understand this. But this is only because God has graciously worked in you to give you a new heart in Christ by His Spirit.

The simple fact is, that if God chose NOT to do this work of redemption in your heart, you would still hate him. You would still be his enemy. You are not his enemy because God has chosen to redeem you.

What is the difference between the apostle Paul and Haman the Agagite? Both sought the destruction of God's people. But in Paul God chose to pour out saving grace. In Haman God chose to pour out his righteous wrath.

Both acts display God's character. One is not more right than the other.

Do you really get this? Do you understand that you and your children could have righteously remained objects of God's destruction? It is this knowledge of the holy wrath of God, that brings into true focus the true wonder of God's grace to us who have been given grace.

I wonder how often Paul pondered why he had been given grace when many of his fellow Pharisees had not.

The fact that women and children are included in the decree of destruction is consistent with "herem" - being placed under the decree of destruction. The fact is: This decree brings to completion God's decree against the Amalekites.

There is one more aspect of the Edict that is worth considering. The Edict allows for the plundering of the goods of those who oppose the Jews. This would make perfect sense. When you conquer a people, the spoils of war are yours to keep. Normally that is. But this is not a normal situation. When God pronounces "herem" upon a people, they are "devoted to destruction". And one of the implications is that whatever belongs to them is also devoted to destruction. This is another way in which King Saul got himself into trouble. He kept the best of the animals. God was angry at Saul for this.

So, if it is true that the situation in Esther is one of "herem" (being devoted to destruction), then we would expect that God's people would NOT keep the plunder.

Take a moment and look over in chapter 9.

Esther 9:10 the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews, but they laid no hand on the plunder.

Esther 9:15 The Jews who were in Susa gathered also on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and they killed 300 men in Susa, but they laid no hands on the plunder.

Esther 9:16 ¹⁶ Now the rest of the Jews who were in the king's provinces also gathered to defend their lives, and got relief from their enemies and killed 75,000 of those who hated them, but they laid no hands on the plunder.

What we see in Esther is most certainly an example of "herem".

This is confirmed to us in that the Jews keep their hands off all of the plunder.

[I do not really know why Mordecai has it written into the decree.]

Read Esther 8:13.

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.

Again, the idea of vengeance here is not personal revenge.

It is the working out of God's divine vengeance.

God gives us specific examples of this vengeance in time so that we will know and except that it will surely occur on the Judgment Day.

Read Esther 8:14.

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.

Read Esther 8:15-17.

What was the result of Mordecai's decree?

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.

Mordecai is given royal honor.

This too foreshadows the honor that will be given to Jesus Christ when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is LORD.

And there is gladness, joy and honor.

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.

The Jews had light.
The darkness had been dispelled.
There was gladness and joy among the Jews.

As I read this, I was almost convinced that the decree had already taken place. But that is not true. All we have so far is the decree itself reaching the ears of the Jews. All of their light and gladness and joy and honor comes from the hope of the edict being worked out in the future.

This is very much like our situation today. We have the New Edict in Christ. Every enemy of the Church and of Christ will be crushed on that Day. It will come about. Even though it has not yet come about. But if an edict of a Persian king cannot be revoked, then the oath of the LORD Jesus is certainly made more certain.

So what should be our response to this certain destruction of all who are enemies of God's people?

- Light, and gladness, and joy and honor...
- And feasting...
 - o We should celebrate, in advance, the victory of our LORD Jesus Christ.

And the knowledge of this decree should alter the way we do evangelism:

And many from the peoples of the country declared themselves Jews,
for fear of the Jews had fallen on them.

I don't want to conclude what is not explicit in the text. Many who declared themselves Jews may not have been genuine. But in a day where we are told that fear is not a good motivation for becoming a Christian, I would beg to differ. It certainly should not be the only motivation. The experience of the love of God in Christ is paramount. But it is difficult for me to think that Paul did not experience some fear when Jesus showed up to him on the road to Damascus. The fact is that many of those who were opposed to the Jews, "declared themselves as Jews".

Much of the boldness that I receive to share the gospel with people comes from the knowledge of their certain destruction apart from Christ. And, the older that I get, the more I include in my sharing the gospel, the certainty of the Day of Judgment.

Judgment will indeed fall on all who are not covered in the blood of Christ. This message ought to be included in our proclamation of the gospel.

Revelation 18:20-24 ²⁰ Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!" ²¹ Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence, and will be found no more; ²² and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters, will be heard in you no more, and a craftsman of any craft will be found in you no more, and the sound of the mill will be heard in you no more, ²³ and the light of a lamp will shine in you no more, and the voice of bridegroom and bride will be heard in you no more, for your merchants were the great ones of the earth, and all nations were deceived by your sorcery. ²⁴ And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth."

Revelation 19:1-2 After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, ² for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants."