

The Book of Esther

“Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a garment of fine linen and purple: and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad. The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honour.”
—*Esther 8:15,16*

IN LAST MONTH'S ISSUE of *The Dawn* we considered the first five chapters of the Book of Esther, in which Haman, the evil enemy of the Jews, had devised a plan by which all the Israelites dwelling in the kingdom of Persia would be destroyed. In the closing verses of chapter five, Haman additionally contrived a plot to kill Mordecai, a trusted servant of King Ahasuerus. Let us now examine the remainder of this interesting and thought-provoking account. Therein we will note the all-seeing eye of the God of Israel, and the power and protection demonstrated over his covenant people.

The first three verses of chapter six recall a certain night when Ahasuerus could not sleep. In his restless state, it was brought to the king's remembrance that he had failed to reward Mordecai for his

earlier warning about the seditious plot of Bigthan and Teresh, two of the palace doorkeepers, recorded in Esther 2:21-23. As Ahasuerus pondered how to reward the faithfulness of Mordecai in saving his life in that earlier experience, he was told by his servants that Haman was in the outer court and desired to speak with him, to which the king assented.

PRIDE EXALTED IN HAMAN

Unknown yet to the king, Haman had come to ask him for permission to hang Mordecai because of his refusal to bow down before him. However, before he could make his sinister request of the king, Ahasuerus asked Haman what should be done to reward the man whom the king delighted to honor. Saturated with pride and vanity, Haman could think of no one but himself that the king would delight to honor. His thoughts showed the deep conceit and arrogance of his nature, and his love of outward honor and glory.—Esther 6:4-6

This was Haman's suggestion: "Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head: And let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour."—vss. 8,9

Although the account does not specifically state, it may have been that Ahasuerus had been watching Haman ever since he had exalted him so highly. (Esther 3:1) In so doing, the king may have sensed irony in the

scene now unfolding, especially since Mordecai's Jewish nationality was generally known, and Haman's hatred of all Jews was well documented. The king commanded very particularly: "Make haste, and take the apparel and horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken." —Esther 6:10

Ahasuerus' command was that it be done immediately. "Make haste," and the king must be obeyed. Had Haman been of a worthy character he would have been glad thus to honor a faithful servant; and, had he less pride, the honor he suggested would have been deserving to the one receiving it. How he must have choked on the words he was commanded to proclaim while leading Mordecai in princely regalia and mounted on the king's own horse through the streets of the capital city: "Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour."—vs. 11

This experience must have been utterly humiliating to Haman, but he had to obey the king's order. Such honors were among the highest that could be bestowed on anyone not of the princely bloodline. In Haman's mind, nothing could have been more crushing. No wonder he hung his head in shame as he went homeward, lest any of his friends should meet and recognize him. What a complete and disastrous reversal this was, yet Haman's own mouth had selected the conditions, and his own hand had to carry them out.

When Haman reached home with his head covered, he told his wife and all his friends what had befallen him. The signs were ominous. His wise men said that if Mordecai was of the seed of the Jews then certainly Haman could not prevail against him, but would

surely fall. (vss. 12,13) What was the source of this seeming certainty? The history of Daniel and the experience of the three young Hebrews in the fiery furnace was no doubt known to them. Other deliverances which God had effected for the Jews at different times were also surely recognized among many nations.—Deut. 11:25; Josh. 2:9-11

ESTHER REVEALS HAMAN'S PLOT

In chapter seven all of the preceding events reach a climax, in which we view the following circumstances play out. First, we see Haman's pride and self-confidence is sorely shattered, and he is greatly perplexed and fearful. Second, Queen Esther is determined at any cost to save her people, yet she is careful and wise before the king. Third, we find that King Ahasuerus accomplishes two things—the rewarding of a faithful servant, while at the same time quelling the grasping ambitions of an officer of the court. What a dramatic scene is thus unfolded!

The banquet requested by the queen, as recorded in Esther 5:8, had now begun. As the king had done at the previous banquet, he again requested her petition. Note the endearing words of Ahasuerus, "What is thy petition, queen Esther?" He then repeats more earnestly his offer of up to half the kingdom. Note the order of Esther's answer. She asks for her life, thus for the first time openly declaring her Jewish nationality, and then asks for the lives of her people. She does not even remotely suggest the king's responsibility for the difficulty, but states the facts of the situation. Calling attention to the thoroughness of the decree previously given to destroy all the Jews, she reiterates it: "We are sold, I and my people, to be

destroyed, to be slain, and to perish.” She says that if it had been only slavery, or bondage, she could have borne it and said nothing.—Esther 7:1-4

What a shock this statement must have been both to Haman and the king! Haman could hardly have suspected that the queen herself was a Jewess, and began to realize into what a dangerous pit his pride and vanity had dragged him. Ahasuerus could not fail to understand for the first time that the queen whom he loved greatly was of Jewish heritage. The king realized what an intolerable situation had been created by the earlier decree to kill all the Jews, and his anger began to rise.

Perhaps beginning to realize the author of the difficulty, Ahasuerus demanded to know who had such a swelling of heart ambitions that he had dared thus to threaten the king’s own household. Calmly, but without mincing words, Esther said that “this wicked Haman” was the author of the plot to destroy all the Jews, including the king’s servant Mordecai. Stunned and speechless, Haman now feared for his life. The king, in his wrath, went out into the palace garden, overwhelmed with the realization of how Haman had used him as a tool to wreak destruction on the Jews and on Mordecai. The king needed to collect his thoughts, and decide what action should be taken. What an astounding revelation it was that one of his closest officers had such a treacherous plan in mind!—vss. 5-7

While the king was outside, Haman, in desperation, begged for his life to Queen Esther, falling to her feet as she reclined on a couch. At this instant the king returned, full of rage at being so duped by Haman. To make matters worse, he now found Haman at the foot of the queen’s couch. His rage

exploded as he accused Haman of not having even decent reverence for the queen's person, "Will he force the queen also before me in the house?" Ahasuerus was convinced that such a man was not worthy to continue to live. The attendants covered Haman's head and took him out for execution.—vss. 7,8

One of the chamberlains who served before the king informed him that gallows were already erected. Ironically, Haman had them made for carrying out his plan for hanging Mordecai. Ahasuerus thought it a most fitting retribution for such conduct that Haman be hanged on the very gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai. "So they hanged Haman. ... Then was the king's wrath pacified."—vss. 9,10

It was no less than the overruling providence of Jehovah, the Almighty Creator, the covenant God of the Jewish people, which had swiftly turned back upon Haman the slaughter he had intended for God's people. Likewise, the same God, the fountain of wisdom, justice, love and power, is now preparing to destroy the great enemy, not only of the Jews, but of all mankind, and to break up his household—that is, Satan and his empire. This will be accomplished in the final destruction of the forces which rise up against Jerusalem, in the last phase of the battle of Armageddon. It will mean the binding of Satan, and the breaking up of his kingdom of darkness, cruelty and selfishness over all mankind. (Zech. 14:1-3; Rev. 16:16,17; 20:1,2) Then a "new heavens and a new earth" will be established, "wherein dwelleth righteousness." Indeed, a glorious deliverance for the whole human race, and a declaration of liberty for all men, is just before us!—II Pet. 3:13; Isa. 25:6-12; 35:1-10; 61:1-11

THE JEWS ARE SAVED

“On that day” the king gave Mordecai the place of honor, service, and authority which Haman had so misused. The signet ring which the king had given to Haman, but which had now been reclaimed, was given to Mordecai. Ahasuerus recognized his merit, and no doubt was glad to delegate some of his authority, cares and responsibilities to one who had so proved his loyalty. Esther informed the king that Mordecai had been her guardian, and that she was the daughter of Mordecai’s uncle. The king gave all of Haman’s property and household to Esther, and she put Mordecai in charge of it. (Esther 8:1,2) These matters were now under the king’s protection and favor, but the decree against the Jews still remained in force, and needed to be remedied.

Wisely Mordecai left to Queen Esther the interceding for the Jewish people. He could not act without the king’s order, and he would not presume on the king’s favor. Once more Esther risked her life in coming before the king without being invited. As had happened before, however, Ahasuerus held out his golden scepter to her, inviting her to stand before him. Esther tearfully pleaded with the king to reverse the decree against the Jews. She was careful to state that the whole plot was the work of Haman. He had used the king as a tool to get personal vengeance, and to promote his own position in the kingdom. Esther appealed to the king: “How can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or ... to see the destruction of my kindred?”—vss. 3-6

The king told her that his signet ring had signed the decree, and according to the laws of the Medes and Persians it could not be reversed. However, his

sympathy and good will went out to her, for he realized that he had been partly responsible, because he had given Haman the signet ring with full authority to use it as he saw fit. Ahasuerus suggested that Esther and Mordecai get together and draw up a second decree, saying, "Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring: for the writing . . . may no man reverse." This did not nullify the first decree, but it would ingeniously offset it.—vss. 7,8

The king's suggestion quickened the inventive faculties of Esther and Mordecai, and the king's scribes were called, "and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded." The old decree was not revoked, but with this new decree the Jews could now stand to their own defense and slay all that opposed or attacked them, and the king would help them. Ahasuerus realized this might mean civil war in some parts of his empire, but he knew he was doing the right thing by allowing the Jews to defend themselves. Thus, the king's scribes recorded the new decree and sealed it with his ring, proclaiming that it be sent out to all 127 provinces in the Persian empire, "from India to Ethiopia."—vss. 9-11

The date given in the decree for the Jews to defend themselves was the thirteenth day of Adar, the twelfth month. This was the same day that the first decree had set for the destruction and killing of all the Jews in the kingdom. Understandably, great effort was made to hasten the second decree. The empire post roads were used, seeing how much depended upon the mandate, and how necessary that all the provincial governors comprehended the real wishes of the king, which were to save the Jews.

Thus, we need not be surprised that all haste was made.—Esther 8:12-14

What a relief and cause for deep thankfulness and rejoicing that the Jews' fasting and humbling themselves was now to bring a wonderful deliverance in answer. (Esther 4:3,12) Note the expression: "The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honour" among the people. Many in the empire became Jews. They reasoned that such royal favor as to have issued such a counter decree, must mean that the Jews were in great esteem. Some may have thought it merely good policy, but a fear and respect fell upon all the people.—Esther 8:16,17

VICTORY OVER THEIR ENEMIES

The record continues: "In the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have power over them," contrariwise the Jews "had rule over them that hated them." Public sympathy, however, was now mostly with the Jews, whose favor a majority of the people sought. From the account it seems that the Jews did not remain on the defensive, but proceeded "to lay hand on such as sought their hurt." Their true enemies were doubtless well known to them, and the Jews were prepared for the struggle.—Esther 9:1,2

The rulers of the provinces, the lieutenants, deputies and officers, all helped the Jews, for the fear of Mordecai fell on them. A change seemed to be taking place. Mordecai, a Jew, became great in the king's household, and his influence increased until his fame went out abroad to all parts of the empire. Evidently the king found him trustworthy, capable and honest, and so delegated more of the authority and business of the empire to him.—vss. 3,4

In Shushan, the royal city of the empire, there fell five hundred of the Jews' enemies. These included the ten sons of Haman. The real Persians, who formed the standing army and kept the empire in order, were at the disposal of the governors of the provinces. These all helped the Jews, in accordance with the decree of Mordecai and Esther. The enemies were almost entirely among the idolatrous people of the various subject nations, for whose lives neither the king nor the Persians cared greatly.—vss. 5-12

In another part of the city, on the next day, the Jews slew three hundred men. The account states, however, that they did not take any spoil. In this they showed great restraint and wisdom, as legally they could have taken it. Throughout the empire the Jews refrained from this, to show to the public and to the king that all they wanted was justice, security, and freedom to pursue their calling in life.—vss. 15,16

Thus, a great deliverance was accomplished. Enemies had plotted to destroy the Jewish people. However, through fasting, self-denial, and obedience to Esther and Mordecai, rescue had come about in such a way as not only to deliver the Jews, but to stamp and publish the occurrence as a testimony to all peoples that their covenant God was a living and powerful deliverer, and to spread respect of him among all people.

The world quickly forgets, however, and new devices and plots against the Jewish people have continued to arise over the centuries. God has permitted some of these as punishments upon the nation for their disobedience, or to teach them certain lessons, but he has seen to it that the Jews as a people have not been destroyed. The covenant-keeping God of Abraham,

Isaac and Jacob has delivered them in the face of every attempt to bring about their destruction.

The Scriptures indicate that there is yet one more great tribulation to be permitted to come upon the nation of Israel. (Jer. 30:4-11) Out of this God has promised to bring about such a complete and emphatic deliverance as shall make all nations realize that only by God's hand could this be brought to pass. This will signal the beginning of the blessing of all nations, Jews and Gentiles alike, until all become the sons of God on the human plane, in loving helpfulness and cooperation with one another.—Rev. 21:3-7

The Jews rejoiced with a great feast on the 14th of the month Adar, and in their rejoicing shared their bounties with one another, especially the poor. They rested on the 15th day. Subsequently, Mordecai sent out word establishing the 14th and 15th days of Adar as feast days to be observed annually in commemoration of their deliverance.—Esther 9:17-21

We note the expression in verse 22: "The month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day." How similar are these words to Psalm 30:5, which state, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." This language calls our attention to the blessed morning of God's kingdom, the time of great deliverance for all mankind from the great enemy, Satan and his evil cohorts. God will wipe away the tears from off all faces, and all evil will be restrained.—Isa. 25:6-10; Rev. 21:4

The Jews named this feast "the days of Purim," after the Hebrew word *Pur*, which means "lot," because Haman had cast lots to destroy the Jewish

people, and the lot fell on this thirteenth day of Adar. (Esther 3:7,13) Esther and Mordecai wrote out the proclamation as a law, and sent it to all the provinces in the king's name, that the Jews shall observe these days unto all generations.— Esther 9:23-32

A GREATER DELIVERANCE

The concluding words of the Book of Esther are a very fitting close to the inspiring record of God's deliverance of his people, the greatness of Mordecai, and the peace of God's people. (Esther 10:1-3) It should increase our faith now, when the enemy seems to be coming in as a flood and overwhelming the hopes for peace and prosperity which for centuries have been the desire of mankind. The restraints of law and order are breaking down under the pressure of evil influences.

However, we know that in this situation also the wisdom of the Almighty will bring order out of the confusion at exactly the proper moment. The prophecies indicate that God will allow Satan and his servants to give such an exhibition of themselves and their ways as to revolt all the decent of mankind, and to teach them the eternal lesson of the danger of admitting even a thought of selfishness and disobedience in any direction, for such will certainly lead to misery and death.

Let us, then, learn the message of the Book of Esther. God will in the proper time and way bring deliverance to all those who trust in him. All evil will be destroyed, and mankind will be delivered from sin's degrading, blinding and destroying influence, into everlasting freedom, happiness and fellowship with their loving Creator. ■