

ESTHER

For Such A Time As This

by

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CHAPTER NINE

THE TABLES TURNED

IN USING THE TITLE which we have given to this chapter we are not unmindful of the fact that it might be taken to mean a mere “change of fortune as in gaming.” And the occurrence of the word “turned” in the first verse of the chapter appears to confirm that idea. But there is no such thing as “chance” in the plan and purpose of God, even though Haman did cast lots to determine the day on which he hoped to destroy the Jews. We have seen already that the lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord (Proverbs 16:33). With that in mind we know that what may appear to be a matter of luck, or chance, is really a part of God’s divine purpose.

The favorable turn in the affairs of the Jews was preceded by a more significant turn in the life of the most outstanding Jew of that day, Mordecai himself. In our first acquaintance with him we noted that he was probably one of those who did not take advantage of the opportunity given to return to the land of his fathers when the decree permitting that went forth from King Cyrus. Moreover, it will be recalled that he commanded his cousin Esther to hide her identity in that he bade her not to reveal the fact that she was a Jewess. But when the real test came, and he was called upon to give reverence to Haman, he was bold enough to refuse to do that which was forbidden by the Law of Moses.

For a while it looked as though he might have to pay for his refusal with his life. But he stood his ground, and in the end he was honored for that. Indeed, the very one to whom he refused to pay homage was compelled to honor him instead. And then, as we have seen just now in our study of chapter 8, he was promoted much higher. But such honor is not something to be enjoyed as a matter of personal advantage. In the portion now before us we see how Mordecai used his high position for the good and blessing of others. And that is as it should be.

The fateful day “**when the king’s commandment and his decree drew near to be put in execution**” arrived. That was the day when “**the enemies of the Jews hoped to have power over them.**” And we may well imagine how excited everybody would be. Twelve long months had rolled by since that date was set, not because it would take all of that time to make preparation, but because Haman had found it difficult to determine “the lucky day.”

The fact that it was so difficult to fix the day may account for the statement here that they **“hoped to have power over”** the Jews. Apparently, there was some doubt about the final outcome after all.

The word for power in this verse is the same as that which is translated rule in the next sentence. The Psalmist used the same word in Psalm 119:133 when he prayed, **“Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me.”** And the answer to that prayer is found in Romans 6:14 where the apostle Paul tells us by the Spirit that **“sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.”** Of such things, naturally, the Jews of that day had no knowledge. But we know that the things which happened unto them were written for our learning. And thus we may learn something of the manner in which the Lord did deliver His own from the power and dominion of sin and Satan when **“it was turned to the contrary”** and **“the Jews had rule over them that hated them.”**

The Jews' first move was to gather **“themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt.”** It would appear from this statement that they had had certain cities assigned to them by the king. In gathering in their own cities they would not unnecessarily expose themselves to the assault of the enemy. In other words, they would not provoke hostility by going where they did not belong. In that they showed more common sense than do some of God's children today. Not a few Christians are caught in the toils of sin and Satan because they insist on going where they have no need to go. Then, too, failure to gather together with their brethren in the appointed place is very often the first step on the downward road of backsliding which leads to defeat. The truly happy man is **“the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful”** (Psalm 1:1).

If the enemy should decide to pursue us even in the place of God's choosing, then it is he who exposes himself to danger and defeat. There may be times when we shall have to meet the enemy on his own ground. But by and large we know that it is far safer to meet him where we may be certain of the complete protection of the Almighty. Then it will be true of us as it was of them in that day, **“no man could withstand them; for the fear of them fell upon all the people.”**

“Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (I John 5:4).

It is interesting to observe that they were helped also by the officers of King Ahasuerus, **“because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them. For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces: for this man Mordecai waxed greater and greater.”**

In this respect he reminds us of King David of whom it is also said that he **“waxed greater and greater: for the Lord of hosts was with him”** (I Chronicles 11:9). In view of such statements it might even be possible to consider Mordecai as a type of the Lord Jesus of whom John the Baptist said, **“He must increase, but I must decrease”** (John 3:30). Evidently Mordecai went on **“increasing”** to the end of his life. Truly **“the path of the just is as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day”** (Proverbs 4:18).

Under such powerful leadership the Jews were well off. **“Thus the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them.”** No doubt some may wonder how we can make any application of this to the Christian. We Christians war, but we do not war according to the flesh. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds (II Corinthians 10:4).

Now if we think of Haman as a type of the Devil, and his sons and servants as types of those hosts which are under the leadership of the Devil, we shall have no difficulty in making an application for our own instruction and encouragement. The fact that **“in Shushan the palace the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men”** lends itself well to such an application.

Right there at headquarters, so to speak, we find the enemy in considerable force. And it is reasonable to suppose that they must have identified themselves as enemies of the Jews by some attack upon them, because the Jews laid hands only on such as sought their hurt.

Among those slain in the palace we find the ten sons of Haman all of whom are mentioned by name. And since names had real meaning in those days, it is interesting to see what these may mean. Mr. Thomas Newberry has ventured to give the meanings in the margin of that edition of the Bible which is sometimes referred to as The Englishman’s Bible. There we are told that Parshandatha means *“of noble birth”*; Dalphon, *“strenuous”*; Aspatha, *“given by the horse”*; Poratha, *“ornament”*; Aridatha, *“great birth”*; Parmashta, *“strong-fisted”*; Arisai, *“like to a lion”*; and Vayzatha, *“sincere.”* He offers no meanings for Adalia and Aridai. But if we may accept as correct the meanings given to the others, then it would appear that this was a proud family. Without doubt the ten sons of Haman took the lead in an attempt to carry out the decree of their father. But not one of them lived to carry on the name of his father.

The historian is careful to note that the Jews did not lay their hand on the spoil. In this they showed more self-control than Achan of whom we read in the Book of Joshua. Among the spoils of Jericho he saw a goodly Babylonish garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold, and he could not resist the temptation to carry them off. But the Jews at Shushan the palace were not interested in material things. There were bigger things at stake than silver and gold. And they did not allow that which was material and secondary to take their eyes off the real objective. Their existence as a people meant more to them just then than temporary riches. And their behavior at that time exhibits a fine sense of values. Would to God that they had always acted that way! And that goes for the rest of us also.

We come now to the report of all this which was made to the king.

“On that day the number of those that were slain in Shushan the palace was brought before the king. And the king said unto Esther the queen, The Jews have slain and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the palace, and the ten sons of Haman; what have they done in the rest of the king’s provinces? now what is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: or what is thy request further? and it shall be done.”

Apparently, the king expressed no surprise at the large number of anti-Semites which had been slain in his palace that day. The report from the provinces had not yet come in. But it seems not to matter to him whether the number be large or small, he stands ready to grant the queen even more than she had already received from him. And that shows that what he was doing was not being done grudgingly. While it is true that he did not on this occasion add the familiar words, “even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed,” nevertheless, he did say, **“it shall be granted,”** and **“it shall be done.”**

“Then said queen Esther, If it please the king, let it be granted to the Jews which are in Shushan the palace to do tomorrow also according unto this day’s decree, and let Haman’s ten sons be hanged upon the gallows.”

In making this request the queen showed that she was aware of the fact that the decree of Ahasuerus had specified that the Jews should be ready against that day, that is, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month. The decree did not go beyond that one day. But she must have known quite well that there were other enemies who had not yet been apprehended. They may have gone into hiding when they saw what took place. But they were not to be trusted. To allow them to live would be to risk future assaults. They must be completely exterminated.

“And the king commanded it so to be done: and the decree was given at Shushan; and they hanged Haman’s ten sons.”

In view of the fact that Haman’s sons had already been slain this may appear to contradict the statement made in verse 12. But we know from II Samuel 21:12 that the corpses of those who had been slain were sometimes hanged afterward to expose them to open shame, as it were. For example, **“The bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son”** were stolen by the men of Jabesh-gilead, **“from the street of Bethshan, where the Philistines had hanged them, when the Philistines had slain Saul in Gilboa.”** And such was probably the case here. But we may be sure that Queen Esther would never have requested such a thing without great provocation. If we knew all that was involved in the plot of Haman, we should probably find that her request was fully justified, for she was neither a Jezebel nor an Athaliah.

Royal permission having been obtained for another day of vengeance **“the Jews that were in Shushan gathered themselves together on the fourteenth day also of the month Adar, and slew three hundred men at Shushan; but on the prey they laid not their hand.”**

We may well imagine what might have happened later if those three hundred men had been permitted to live. Their continued existence would have constituted a constant threat and danger. In that connection it will be recalled that when the Lord commissioned King Saul to **“go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed,”** he and his people spared Agag the king of the Amalekites, **“and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly”** (I Samuel 15:9 ff).. It was this failure to carry out the commandment of the Lord that led to the rejection of Saul as king of Israel, and he had to learn through bitter experience that **“to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams”** (v. 22).

The Jews of Esther's day made no such mistake even though we do not read a word about the Lord, or His Word, in the whole account of what they did.

If the anti-Semites of Esther's day were Amalekites, as we have reason to believe they were, then it may be that the Jews did remember that the Lord had said to Moses, **“Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven”** (Exodus 17:14).

That the Jews were to be the divine instruments to accomplish this is clear from the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 25:17-19. **“Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; how he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God. Therefore it shall be, when the Lord thy God hath given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget it.”**

Had they done that after they were settled in the land, Haman and his house would never have been heard of. Their very existence proved that Israel had failed to carry out this commandment of the Lord. Their present plight was the sad fruit of their disobedience. And that may account for the thoroughness with which they went about their destruction now.

“But the other Jews that were in the king's provinces, gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives, and had rest from their enemies, and slew of their foes seventy and five thousand, but they laid not their hands on the prey.”

The number of casualties in what was really a defensive action, so far as the Jews were concerned, will give some idea of the magnitude of this plot on the part of the enemy to exterminate them. If they had not **“gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives,”** the final outcome would have been defeat instead of victory and **“rest from their enemies.”** We have already seen the importance of gathering and standing—two things which the Church of our day might well take to heart. Nothing weakens like division, and the enemy knows that. Let us not fail then to learn the lesson from this part of God's Word which will enable us to gain glorious victories over our adversary the Devil.

The Jews that were in the king's provinces required but one day to dispose of their enemies. That was **“on the thirteenth day of the month Adar; and on the fourteenth day of the same rested they, and made it a day of feasting and gladness.”**

The fact that they rested on the fourteenth day sounds as though they kept that day as a sabbath. If so, it was not a sabbath of sadness but of gladness, a day of feasting. It was the Lord's plan that the sabbath should be a day of refreshing and rest. **“Six days shalt thou do thy work, and on the seventh thou shalt rest: that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed”** (Exodus 23:12).

“But the Jews that were at Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth day thereof, and on the fourteenth thereof; and on the fifteenth day of the same they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness.” And we like to think that it was likewise a day of thanksgiving to Him who had given them this great deliverance. If the fourteenth day was a sabbath, as we have suggested, then this fifteenth day would be the first day of a new week; another **“morrow after the sabbath,”** as it were.

The difference between **“the Jews that were in Shushan”** and **“the Jews of the villages, that dwell in unwalled towns”** is interesting because it may serve as an illustration of the fact that some of the children of God seem to realize and enjoy their deliverance from sin and Satan sooner than others. With some, the joy of being set **“free from the law of sin and death”** (Romans 8:2) seems to come immediately after their conversion. In the case of others, that joy seems to be delayed until after they have had an experience such as the apostle Paul describes in Romans 7. But when we cry from the heart, **“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”** then comes the answer, **“I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”** The Jews in Persia knew that they had been delivered, but there is no evidence that they knew, or acknowledged, the One who had delivered them.

Nevertheless, they did celebrate. It was **“a day of gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another.”** This is very similar to another celebration which took place in Jerusalem some years later, in the days of Nehemiah. At that time **“all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law.”** But Nehemiah said to them, **“Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength”** (Nehemiah 8:9, 10).

This was not quite so spontaneous as the celebration in the days of Esther, but it was much more spiritual. The people of Nehemiah’s day knew who it was who had delivered them and had given them occasion to feast.

The Jews of Esther’s day apparently took no notice of their divine Host. And many professing Christians of our day are guilty of the same thing. They celebrate Thanksgiving Day, Christmas, and Easter with little or no thought of the One who gives those days their true significance. And to behold non-Christians celebrating those days seems strange indeed. But that goes to show that we who know the true significance of such days should be more careful than ever to preserve it. In so doing we might be used of the Lord to lead others to discover it for themselves. This is a much-needed ministry in this land of ours.

~ end of chapter 9 ~

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