

## July 25, 2021 | Esther: Fractured People Flawless God

### Week 9 | Esther 8 | “Revoking the Irrevocable”

#### Announcements:

- Communion and business meeting Sunday, August 8 at 6PM.

Today, we answer that all-important question, "What do you do when confronted with impossible task?" Haman has been dispatched. But his evil plans are still in play. Esther and Mordecai will likely survive if nothing else transpires, but what of their people? These are questions even the most well-educated would have a hard time answering. But thankfully, Esther and Mordecai are unlike any who have come before. Not only do they have a keen intellect, but they also have God working for them. And when God is for you, the impossible is made possible.

#### **READ:** Esther 8:1-2 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>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.

There is a total reversal of fortunes in these two verses. First, Esther is given the riches of the very man, Haman, who plotted to destroy her life and the life of her people. Second, Mordecai is promoted to Prime Minister via a ring that Haman wore. And then, most remarkable of them all, Haman's house is given over to the one man he hated the most, Mordecai.

What's more, Esther finally introduces Xerxes to Mordecai, who, by modern estimations, would've been his father-in-law. But the phrase "what he [Mordecai] was to her [Esther]" means more than that she revealed to Xerxes their familial bond. If that is what is meant by this phrase, the writer of Esther could've used the Hebrew words for "kinsfolk" or "family." Instead, the writer of Esther uses a much broader phrase to imply that their relationship with each other was more than simply a shared bloodline.

As we discussed way back in week 3, the true love story in this book is not between Xerxes and Esther but between a father (Mordecai) and his daughter (Esther). Yes, technically, Mordecai was Esther's cousin. But he was so much more. He adopted Esther and raised her as his own. She was his daughter by choice, not by birth. Mordecai was also Esther's closest friend and confidant. During the four-year beauty pageant, when Esther was taken from her home and groomed to be the king's plaything, Mordecai never once abandoned her. In fact, he visited her

every day to see how she was doing (cf. Esth. 2:4). Mordecai was many things to many different people, but to Esther, he meant the whole world. This she made abundantly clear to Xerxes. Thus, it's not surprising that after Esther explained who Mordecai was to her, Xerxes went ahead and made him the second-in-command. What's extraordinary is that this is the one and only time we see Xerxes acting of his own accord without the need for advice from his counsel. Though, cannot help but think that Esther said all she did with the intent of getting Xerxes to promote Mordecai. She knew she would need his help if she was to succeed in revoking an irrevocable decree.

**READ: Esther 8:3-8 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>When the king held out the golden scepter to Esther, Esther rose and stood before the king.<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup>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?" <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>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."

It bears mentioning that, at this point, the King has had a very long day. For him, this day began when the day before had ended. If you'll remember, sleep alluded him even though he read from the most boring book he could find, "the book of memorable deeds." And, by happen's chance, Xerxes discovered that he had failed to honor Mordecai for saving his life. Which then leads to Haman parading Mordecai around the city. After which, there was the banquet where Esther reveals that Xerxes' closes advisor had manipulated him and plotted to kill his own queen. This then moves to Haman's execution, turning to the King giving Esther Haman's stuff, which then proceeds to Esther revealing Mordecai's identity. Then all that culminates in the king promoting Mordecai to become Prime Minister. Needless to say, it has been a busy day for the king. So much so that the king thought the whole ordeal was over until "Esther spoke again."

The narrator tells us that she not only spoke, but she fell to her knees weeping as she pleaded for Haman's plan to be "averted." This is not melodrama. The villain, Haman, was dead. This much is true. But Haman's plot was still very much alive. And while Esther realized that she and her adoptive father would live, their people would not. This was totally unacceptable. And even though Esther had it all, she cared for none of it so long as the Jews were in jeopardy. So, Esther, Queen of all Persia, gets on her hands and knees and beg for the life of her people. The situation was no less dire than when the banquet began. It was difficult enough to convince Xerxes of Haman's villainy; harder still to convince Xerxes to revoke a decree that he himself had a hand in decreeing.

This is why Esther couches her request in more formality and etiquette than ever before. Four times she uses an "if" clause before saying what she wants: "If it please the king, and if I have found favor in his sight, if the thing seems right before the king, and [if] I am pleasing in his eyes...." Layer upon layer goes the politeness and propriety of Middle Eastern custom to further persuade the king of the impossible: "revoke the letters devised by Haman the Agagite." Since chapter one, it has been well-established that once a law in Persia has been decreed, it cannot be revoked (cf. Esther 1:19). Here, Esther was asking for that very thing. Essentially, she said, "Void the law that Haman decreed, please!" But notice she does not do so based on Xerxes' love for the Jews, of which there was none. Xerxes held no affection for the Israelites. Instead, Esther pleads her case on personal terms. She says, "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?" In other words, "My king and my husband, you have acted before to save my life from the hand of Haman, do so again. Come to my aid and save me from the heartache that this decree will cause me." Esther tries to persuade Xerxes using his own affection for her.

Now, it would seem that Xerxes' response is a favorable one as if he had been convinced by Esther's arguments. But really, his is a response laden with exasperation. He says, "I have you given you Haman's house. I have even hanged Haman for you. What more can I do?!" He even flat out lies when he says he's done this because "[Haman] intended to lay hands on the Jews." Xerxes did not hang Haman as retribution for the Jews. Xerxes used a false accusation to kill Haman because Haman had offended his honor (cf. Esth. 7:8). Like all politicians, Xerxes, when confronted with his own mistakes, wanted to rewrite history. He tried to spin events in such a way that keeps him from admitting he had a hand in Haman's plot. Thus, when Xerxes says, "You [not I, or we] may write as you please concerning 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." What he means is, "This is your problem, not mine. You have the same ring Haman did. You have the same authority to write whatever decree you want. But

I will not admit I had a hand in Haman's plot. And even if I did, it would make no difference; because, as you know, not even I can rescind Persian law." Essentially, Xerxes was both distancing himself from Esther's cause and washing his hands of the matter. As far as he was concerned, he had done everything he could. Aren't you glad that our survival is not dependent upon politicians? That, even when a man cannot see a way through, aren't you happy that God makes a way anyways? For though Xerxes was not smart enough to reverse an irreversible law, Mordecai was.

**READ:** Esther 8:9-14 (ESV)

<sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>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, <sup>11</sup>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, <sup>12</sup>on one day throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>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.

What do you do when a law legalizes force against a particular people group? You make a law that allows that certain people group to defend themselves. This is a classic example of the shield and spear paradox. What happens when an immovable object meets an unstoppable force? As we'll see in the next chapter, the short answer is catastrophe and bloodshed. But the point is that those of Haman's ilk were the unstoppable force aimed at destroying the Jews; they were the spear. Before Mordecai's decree, the Jews were not even allowed to defend themselves. Now, however, while the Jews were not permitted to attack, they were allowed to gather and protect themselves; they were now the unstoppable force, i.e., the shield.

Now, because Mordecai's law had to parallel Haman's in every single point, or the Jews would be exposed to attack, this also meant that force was not only permitted against men who would attack the Jews but also against women and children. This is what is meant by the words, "[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....](#)" Now, we are rightly repulsed by such a law, and we wonder how Haman could decree such a thing. Some have even mistranslated this verse on purpose to avoid this difficulty. But let me remind you that this verbiage is **not** Mordecai's but Haman's (cf. Esth. 3:13). If they were Jewish, Haman had every intention of killing every man, woman, and child. Haman, not Mordecai, wanted to see the blood of Israelite women and children run red in the streets.

Furthermore, as we have already stated, Mordecai's decree did not permit the Jews to attack others without cause. **Instead, it only legalized defense.** Meaning, every Jew would be allowed to defend themselves from every kind of threat, even if that threat was wielded by a child or woman. This is an uncomfortable set of circumstances, to be sure. But these are the facts. And one need only look at our own wars to see how women and children were a genuine threat.<sup>1</sup> Vile men in almost every conflict have used women and children as ammunition. For instance, "tiny guerrillas," which were children as young as 13, were used in armed conflict by the Viet Cong during the Vietnam War.<sup>2</sup> Sadly, this trend continues into the present, with 40% of all child soldiers globally being in active service on the continent of Africa alone.<sup>3</sup>

Mordecai's decree was more a **warning** to all rather than a **threat** to all. He was not telling the Persians that the Jews were coming after their women and children. Instead, he said that **if** the Persians came for the Jews, the Jews were permitted to defend themselves from every kind of threat. We see this play out in how only men are listed amongst the deceased in chapter 9. What's more, while the spoils of war would've been theirs, we are also told that the Jews did not so much as take a bent penny from their enemies. If they did not even take from their enemies that which would've been lawfully theirs, I doubt they would've killed their enemies' women and children.

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia contributors, "Children in the military," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children\\_in\\_the\\_military](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children_in_the_military), [accessed, July 24, 2021].

<sup>2</sup> General Editors, "The Vietnam War: Children at War," February 24, 2016, *The British Library*, <https://blogs.bl.uk/asian-and-african/2016/02/the-vietnam-war-children-at-war.html>, [accessed, July 24, 2021].

<sup>3</sup> Dudenhoefer, Anne-Lynn, "Understanding the Recruitment of Child Soldiers in Africa," February 2016, The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD), <https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-trends/understanding-recruitment-child-soldiers-africa/>, [accessed, July 24, 2021].

**READ: Esther 8:15-17 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honor. <sup>17</sup> 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.

Again, we see a continuation of the theme of reversals in these verses. Mordecai, who, in chapter 4, put on sackcloth and ashes, is here robed in clothes of linen colored in blue, white, and purple and then given a golden crown. The Jews who mourned, fasted, wept, and lamented are shown to be glad and joyful while feasting and making the day a holiday. And, lastly, the city of Susa, which was thrown into confusion by Haman's decree (cf. 3:15), is here shouting and rejoicing at Mordecai's decree and promotion. Xerxes had to decree that all should bow before Haman; he would not need to do so with Mordecai.

What's more, the narrator tells us that "[many from the peoples of the country declared themselves Jews, for fear of the Jews had fallen on them.](#)" Now, this can mean one of two things. A simple reading of the text conveys that many Persians converted, both ethnically and religiously, to Judaism. The other explanation is that many Persians simply aligned themselves with the Jews without totally converting to Judaism. Considering that Mordecai's moniker as "the Jew" seems more to have ethnic rather than religious overtones, the latter of those two explanations seems the most likely. The Persians did not become Jews in the strictest sense of the word. Instead, they identified themselves with the Jews in their cause and heritage. This is substantiated by the fact that a "fear" had descended upon the populace. They would not go against a force that seemed to them unbeatable. A Jew, after all, was the second most powerful man in the country. And if you can't beat them, you join them.

**So, what's the takeaway?**

**Things that are impossible with man are made possible with God.**

Esther and Mordecai were up against an impossible task: revoke an irrevocable decree. And while, technically speaking, they didn't revoke an irrevocable decree, they did nullify it. As we'll see, there is still some bloodshed to come. But God, using Esther and Mordecai, gave his people a fighting chance.

**READ: Mark 9:14-28 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. <sup>15</sup> And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. <sup>16</sup> And he asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" <sup>17</sup> And someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. <sup>18</sup> And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able." <sup>19</sup> And he answered them, "O **faithless** generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me." <sup>20</sup> And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. <sup>21</sup> And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. <sup>22</sup> And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." <sup>23</sup> And Jesus said to him, "'If you can believe, all things are possible for one who believes.'" <sup>24</sup> Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" <sup>25</sup> And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." <sup>26</sup> And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead." <sup>27</sup> But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. <sup>28</sup> And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" <sup>29</sup> And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."

A failure in life stems from a failure to believe. Jesus says if we had but the faith of a grain of a mustard seed, we could move mountains (cf. Lu. 17:6). This does not excuse us from working and doing our part. God will not fill our ditches with water if we do not dig our trenches first (cf. 2 Ki. 3:16-19). But when we are confronted with a problem or challenge that is bigger than us, we must do all that we can and then leave the rest to God. This is what it means to walk by faith. When we have done the possible, we must leave it up to God to do the impossible.

And for the one who walks the same path as this father in Mark 9 or Esther and Mordecai, they will witness as the...

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## VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Esther: Fractured People Flawless God | Week 9 | “Revoking the Irrevocable”

TEXT: Esther 8

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here: