

The World that Left God out God Brings about Deliverance Esther ch 8 & 9:1-19

[New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]

Have you ever been in a situation in your life when you feel everything is against you, where you don't know the right move to make and everyone around you is unable to help? All you think about are questions like: "Why me?", "How has this happened?", "What can I do?", "Who can help me?" In the passage that we are looking at today in the story of Esther we come to chapter 8 and chapter 9:1-19, where we see the deliverance of the Jewish people from those who wanted them destroyed.

To recap the story so far, Esther was a young Jewish girl who had been brought up by her cousin Mordecai in the city of Shushan in the kingdom of Persia. In chapter 2 we read she was in the right place at the right time, when Queen Vashti was deposed, which allowed her to become Queen to King Ahasuerus. In chapters 3 and 4 we learn of Haman's evil plan to destroy Mordecai and all the Jews who were living in Persia. With the king's agreement, a decree was written to enforce this to happen. In chapter 5 we see Esther's courage in risking her life by going before the king with a plan to stop Haman. In chapter 6 we read about the night when the king could not sleep and so he asked for historical records to be read to him. He discovered in reading these that Mordecai had previously been the one who had foiled a plot to kill him. The king wanted to reward this someone and the person he asked advice from was Haman, who thought that it was himself that the king was referring to for reward, but in fact it was Mordecai. In chapter 7 Esther again furthered her plan to expose Haman before the king, which brought about his downfall, and he was hanged on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordecai.

To those who know very little about the Bible and to fellow-Christians alike, when you read the book of Esther there is that immediate thought of why is it found as part of God's word when there is no mention of God in its writings. To me, the book of Esther is like us looking down on a chess board, where we see moves and countermoves and strategies that mimic opposing strategies that seem to say, "Anything you can do I can do better." While we watch this conflict unfold in the book of Esther, we are never shown who the players are. There is without a doubt a battle of good versus evil; and we know that the children of Israel, God's chosen people, were held in captivity in Persia, which was one of the most brutal and evil kingdoms of the history of the world. Esther starts out in the story as a pawn in a volatile game. Mordecai makes decisions for her, and she is subject to other people's expectations and whims. While she had an outward beauty mentioned in chapter 2:7, there was more to Esther than her beauty and obedience. By chapters 4 and 5 it is clear that Esther is intelligent, courageous, and persuasive; and she begins to take control and direct the proceedings with Mordecai. In chapter 5 she dictates the actions and schedules of both the king and Haman in the palace. By chapter 8 we see that she assumes control of the situation and then is the one who, with full authority, writes a decree in chapter 9:29. She devises a strategy and executes it, which brings the ultimate victory in the story.

How then can we identify with Esther? We can tell that she is human, and not always strong, but at the right time she has the courage to act and turns both her life and the life of others around. While all the characters in the story take part within the limitations of their power, there is still the question that remains about the overall bigger picture of the providential events that take place. Where does the power come from? The only true answer is that God is in control, and He is the One who is moving behind the scenes to accomplish His will.

Haman had ordered an edict for the destruction of all the Jews living within the Persian kingdom. When Mordecai heard this, he rent his clothes, dressed in sackcloth with ashes, and went into the city wailing loudly and crying. The Jewish people throughout the land followed the example of Mordecai. The custom of doing what Mordecai and the Jews did was as an outward sign of repentance and humility before God. Queen Esther heard from, and discussed with, Mordecai a plan of action. The only way of saving her people was for her to go into the king's presence and seek mercy for them. Esther would have to risk her life, but she took up the challenge and found favour with the king. We also see in chapters 6 and 7 how Esther and Mordecai found favour from the king and how that Haman was brought to death.

If the story of Esther had finished at the end of chapter 7, we might well have concluded that this was a satisfactory ending for both Esther and Mordecai. But the edict still remained that all the Jewish people were to be killed in nine months time. We see again the strength of character of Esther when she once again risks her life as she goes before the king; and how clever she is not to implicate him in the decree that Haman had devised. In verse 6 of chapter 8 the true character of Esther is brought out when she shows who she belongs to and her love for her fellow-Jews. We read these words, "my people", "my countrymen." For those of us who are Christians and belong to the body of Christ, how many of us can say that we are like Esther and have a real concern for fellow believers? In 1 John 3:18 we read,

"My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth."

and 1 John 4:7,

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God."

And verse 11,

"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

We go on to see God's love and providential care for His people as the story develops through chapters 8 and 9. We can look back to the first book in the Bible, Genesis, which is often regarded as the seed plot of the Bible, to the story of Abraham. In Genesis 12:1-3 God is speaking to Abraham,

"Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Here we have the first promise to Abraham that his seed will become a great nation and that God will bless them. But God also makes a promise to the Gentiles that He will bless those who favour Israel, and that He will deal harshly with those who do evil against them. History has shown this to be true, but as can be read in the prophetic scriptures of Isaiah 14:1-2, Joel 3:1-8, and others,

God's final judgement will come upon all those, in a future day, who have stood against His people and there will be no escape from the punishment.

Again in Genesis chapter 17 and when Abraham is 90 years old, this promise is repeated, even though at that age and without offspring through Sarah his wife, God fulfilled the promise of a son and Isaac was born. We read in chapter 22 of Genesis that God tested Abraham by instructing him to take his only begotten son Isaac and offer him up as a sacrifice. Abraham obeyed and just as he was about to kill Isaac, God intervened and provided a ram for the sacrifice. There at his very deepest point of suffering, as he was about to kill Isaac, he fully learnt that God was true to his word and that no matter how bad any situation is, God will provide. He truly learnt of that name Jehovah-Jireh. Esther and Mordecai, even though they had written a new decree and delivered it throughout the entire empire, were never sure what the outcome was going to be, but they trusted in God, the One who had helped them so far, to deliver their people from their oppressors. In chapter 9 we see the eventual victory that was accomplished over their enemy. They knew then of the care of God for His people, even in that darkest hour. God was still in control, and it was He who eventually had brought about their blessing.

With the death of Haman came the start of the deliverance of the Jewish people from those who wanted to utterly destroy them. The king gives the whole of Haman's estate to Esther, as per Persian law, which stated that on the death of a traitor all his possessions passed to the king. Not only that, but the king gives his signet ring which carried his seal, to Mordecai. Esther then set Mordecai to be in charge of all of Haman's estate. Two months and 10 days had already passed since the king had sanctioned Haman's decree, so it was necessary for Esther and Mordecai to act swiftly. Esther again goes humbly before the king and finds favour in his presence. She asks for Haman's edict to be overturned, but according to Persian law, this could not be done. The king wanted to please Esther so he gives his approval for Esther and Mordecai to write a decree of their own, which would save the Jewish people. This edict was hastily written by the king's scribes, and it was sent with the king's approval. The best of the royal horses and riders were used to take the decree to all parts of the empire. This new edict gave the Jewish people the permission to defend themselves, to destroy and kill all those, including women and children, who planned to attack them, and to take of the spoils of the battle. This was to be allowed only on one day, the same day as Haman had decreed in his plot. Mordecai's importance in the city grew. He was dressed in the royal colours and wore a golden crown on his head.

The people of Shushan began to follow him; and so too in all the provinces, many of the Persian people declared themselves to be Jews because they knew that this would find them favour with the king. In chapter 9 we see the Jews' deliverance brought to a head, such that in the city of Shushan 500 men died and in the provinces 75,000 men died. Even after such a success for the Jews on that day, Esther goes back again to the king and asks that on the following day, if it pleased him, to let the Jews who were in Shushan be allowed to do the same thing but also to have the ten sons of Haman hanged on gallows. King Ahasuerus without question grants her request and commands that it should be done. A further 300 men were killed in Shushan on that second day. To some the request by Esther would seem to be a blood lust, however some crucial details of the account are worth noticing because they temper the assessment in certain important ways. It is seen that the Jews only carried out what was in the edict which allowed them to neutralise the attacks that Haman had ordered.

We can look back in history to God's command in Deuteronomy 25:17-19 that the Amalekites should be totally destroyed but Saul in 1 Samuel 15 disobeyed God and spared Agag, the King of the Amalekites. Here Esther, generations later, was obedient to God's command in destroying all of Haman's family who were Amalekites but the Jews took none of the spoils and they only did what they had to do in order to protect themselves from their attackers and ensure their future safety. It is also good to note that it was only men that were killed, no women and children, even though the edict allowed this.

As we see how God worked out His plan of deliverance, it is evident that He not only uses those who are His own, but that at any time He can use anyone for His purpose. We read in Daniel 2:20-22 how powerful God is.

“Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His. And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness and light dwells in Him.”

In Exodus 14 at the Red Sea, the Israelites saw the power of God in action as Moses held the rod over the Red Sea, which parted allowing them to escape. But the Egyptians, who were following them, were killed as they tried to cross over. Here in Esther the deliverance was just as great, but God used a more subtle approach.

In chapter 9 we see the outcome of all that had gone before. The resolution is summarised as an overturning or - as the New International Version of the Bible puts it – the tables were turned. We also see that the Hebrew verb “to rule over” is used twice, which helps to explain the nature of the complete turnaround whereby the overpowered-ones and ruled-over-ones become the overpowering-ones and the ruling-over-ones. The Jews exercised their power against those who hated them. They now ruled over those who had followed Haman, and those who had wanted to strip them of all their national dignity and honour. Verses 3 and 4 show how Mordecai’s position was turned around. His personal fortunes were indicative of his people’s fortunes. He, like them, had assumed power, earned a reputation, and was feared. He was feared by all ranks of people.

In earlier chapters Mordecai was known as “the Jew”, but in verse 4 it states,

“For this man, Mordecai, became increasingly prominent.”

What a turnaround for Esther, Mordecai, and all the Jewish people! The weak and downtrodden ones, with no ability of their own, became the victors and they had a great celebration. It was only because God was moving behind the scenes that the Jewish people were saved.

What can Christians today learn from this story of deliverance and retribution? We can turn to Romans chapter 8 where Paul brings before us the promise of deliverance for believers in Christ. We have been brought into a place of privilege as adopted sons, heirs of God the Father and joint heirs of the Son. In verse 28, a well-known and oft-quoted verse, we read that,

“All things work together for good to them that love God.”

We see God’s plan for His loved ones in verses 29 and 30. In the truths of divine foreknowledge and our predestination, we have the plan of God before time began. We have His calling and justification of us in this present day and His plan for the future when we will be fully glorified. Well might Paul raise the question in Romans 8:31,

“If God be for us, who can be against us.”

God gave us everything when He gave His only begotten son Jesus to be delivered up for our salvation. Having given us His all, together with Christ, He also will freely give us all things. There are times in our lives when we suffer and we cannot fathom out why God has let things happen but we have to be strong in our faith and in the knowledge that if we, like Esther, take on board the challenges that life gives us and we are willing to be obedient to God’s word, we have the assurance of God’s promise that our deliverance from this earthly scene to a heavenly position is

secure. The closing verses of Romans chapter 8:35-39 give us that peace within our souls that no matter what we have to go through, nothing can separate us from the love of God.

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: “For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Sometimes it is hard to understand the purposes of God, but we do know that God’s children will receive His blessing and those who are His enemies will receive His wrath. Galatians 6:7,

“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”

At the start of our talk, we mentioned questions that we often ask ourselves when we are at our lowest ebb and unable to fathom the way ahead. If we repent of our sin and we trust in Jesus as our Lord, then like Mordecai, Esther, and the Jewish people experienced, He will give us the strength to be patient and wait for His deliverance from our situation. Job is an example of one who lost everything, his family, his money, his friends, and his health, but even at his weakest moment, he could say in Job 19:25-26,

“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God.”

He understood that deliverance from trials would only happen according to God’s timing and may not happen in this life, but all believers have that prospect of spending eternity with Jesus.

When you trust in the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, it is good to have that peace and reassurance in your soul, as He walks beside you every step that you take in life’s journey. David wrote many of his Psalms when he was facing his greatest challenges but he knew that the God he trusted in was able to overcome and deliver him from those situations. Many of our hymn writers have penned some of our greatest hymns and songs when they have been passing through trials.

None more so than Horatio G Spaffard who lost a fortune in the great Chicago fire of 1871 and then his 4 year old son died from scarlet fever. His wife and 4 daughters were on a ship crossing the Atlantic when it collided with another ship and over 200 people lost their lives, including his 4 daughters, leaving only his wife. As he sailed over the Atlantic to meet his wife, when passing the point where the ship sank, he penned the well known words:

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
when sorrows like sea billows roll;
whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
let this blest assurance control,
that Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
and hath shed his own blood for my soul.

It is well with my soul,
it is well, it is well with my soul.

May we all be able to sing with that same assurance of peace within our souls, “It is well, it is well with my soul.”

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on Esther, about the Deliverance of God’s People, talk number T1330.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1.