

Nov 26 –Esther 7-10

Chapter 7

Once the king had thoroughly enjoyed the banquet Esther had prepared for him (as they were drinking wine), he offered once again to grant any petition Esther may have –up to half his kingdom. Esther responds again with great modesty and humility. The only thing she asks from her king is that her life –and the lives of her people- be spared. She now informs the king that she and her people are under threat of annihilation (for the king still does not know what is happening in his own kingdom). “Damage to the king” focusses on the grave loss the king will feel if she were to die, since she has won such favor through her banquets. Esther now boldly names Haman as the mastermind behind this grievous damage to the king, the queen, and her people. The king is furious and walks outside to think about what to do with Haman. While he is out, Haman throws himself down, begging for mercy from Queen Esther. When the king returns, he thinks that Haman is trying to sexually assault Esther, and immediately orders Haman’s death on the same gallows he had prepared for Mordecai.

Chapter 8

The book of Esther is all about reversal of fortunes –specifically the way in which the underdog (the Jews) is lifted up, and the proud/villainous (Haman) are brought low. The ending of this story is the story of God’s people again and again, it’s what Mary sings about in her Magnificat. In a grand reversal of fortunes, following Haman’s death, faithful Mordecai is lifted up to his position of prominence within the Persian government. Esther now, appropriately, reveals that Mordecai is her elder, the one who raised her, and therefore should be honored accordingly. He is given the king’s signet ring and even Haman’s luxurious house! But, while the king’s grace had spared Esther and Mordecai and had dispatched of their immediate enemy, they still had the problem of all of the fear and vitriol against the Jews that Haman’s edict had stirred up across the empire. Any edict sealed with the king’s ring could not be revoked, according to law, so the king suggests that Esther and Mordecai issue whatever counter-edict they feel would save their people from the coming genocide.

The edict put out by Esther and Mordecai simply stated that Jews would be governmentally supported in their decision to mobilize and defend themselves against their enemies, and that they were allowed to take plunder from their enemies if they wished. The Jews were not told to go after all Persians, but rather only to avenge themselves against those who

were actively meaning to cause them harm. Where there had once been chaos and fear from Haman's edict, Mordecai's edict was cause for celebration and joy. "Fear of the Jews had fallen upon them" is more appropriately rendered: reverence for the Jews.

Chapter 9-10

When the day of the attempted genocide finally came, the Jews prevailed against their enemies. The Jews in every province had the full support of their governments in protecting themselves. They struck down their enemies, but did not take plunder as the edict allowed, because it was viewed as an un-Jewish, inappropriate practice of war since Saul got in trouble by God for taking plunder from enemies. By repeating "they did not touch the plunder" the author underscores the faithfulness of the Jews. Throughout most of the kingdom, the fighting occurred only on the 13th day, but in Susa Esther requests a second day for the battle between the Jews and their enemies. Why? Perhaps as a leading city there was a higher concentration of enemies of the Jews –particularly those stirred up by Haman himself and his 10 sons who lived in Susa? No one knows for sure, but what is interesting is that the king now grants this request without deferring decision making to his advisors. He seems to be taking a greater interest in the events of his kingdom, and making decisions for himself as a leader. These two days on which the fighting occurred now form the basis for the festival of Purim (named after the Pur –the lot- which Haman used to determine the date of the genocide). Purim is a joyful festival still celebrated in Judaism to this day. Purim is celebrated by exchanging gifts of food and drink, donating to charity, eating a celebratory banquet, public recitation of the scroll of Esther, and wearing masks or costumes (as a way of emulating God, who "disguised" God's presence in the story behind the natural events/coincidences). The work concludes by praising Mordecai, who is described much the same way Joseph and Daniel ended up being described after having risen to political prominence in foreign lands. Mordecai is honored, and in so doing Esther is honored through her association with him.