

## **“THE GREAT REVERSAL.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Scripture Texts: Esther 9:1-17**

### **The Day of Deliverance, 9:1-10.**

I have mentioned before the book of Esther is considered to be one of the greatest short stories ever written. From a purely literary point of view it is considered a master piece of writing.

Many of the chapters end with cliffhangers, like those TV shows that end with you on the edge of your seat and wanting to come back.

Chapter one ends with a deposed Queen Vashti and who would be next.

Chapter three ends with the king's prime minister, Haman, issuing a decree to kill all the Jews in all 127 provinces of the Persian Empire, which throws Susa into turmoil.

At Mordecai's urging, chapter four ends with Esther agreeing to risk her life and approach the king, saying, "If I perish, I perish."

Chapter five ends with Haman building a gallows on which to kill Mordecai the next day.

Chapter six recounts a one-day flurry of activity that throws everything into turmoil and chaos.

In chapter eight Mordecai is raised to Haman's position. He can't revoke Haman's decree so with the king's blessing he issues a counter decree allowing the Jews to defend themselves against their enemies.

Chapter nine begins in a dramatic way that captures the building tension, what will actually happen on that fateful day. Ten months of anxious waiting. The enemies of the Jews plot, the Jews prepare.

What will happen? Will it work? The previous decree cannot be revoked, will Mordecai's decree have any effect?

Both sides have royal law on their side. Will the unseen and unheard from God of the Jews help them? Is He really present? Is God's providential care a real thing or not?

Notice how Esther 9:1 is written. Five clauses piled on top of each other before we get to the object of the sentence. It's like the writer wants us to see how much was stacked against the Jews, or how close they came to utter annihilation.

What actually happens comes after a long string of the most improbable of events. No one could have seen this possibility coming a year ago.

**Esther 9:1** Now in the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king's command and edict were about to be carried out, on the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, the reverse occurred: the Jews gained mastery over those who hated them.

After five intense clauses, three words, "The reverse occurred."

The great reversal of course is that the Jews were given the right to defend themselves from their enemies. They could kill those who tried to kill them.

Remember the 13<sup>th</sup> of Adar was Haman's lucky day, decided by the casting of some dice. This day was to be a kind of jihad, a holy war against God's people. It was to be an ethnic cleansing of half a million Jews. All the Jews, men, women, and children. And all their possessions were to be plundered.

Mordecai and Esther had done all they can to overcome the evil, but now they await the outcome. Will evil prevail?

**Esther 9:2, 5** The Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm. And no one could stand against them, for the fear of them had fallen on all peoples. ... 5 The Jews struck all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and did as they pleased to those who hated them.

When and where they were attacked they struck back. The Jews appear to be responding defensively, only when provoked. Their success seems to be credited to the fear of the Jews that had spread across the land.

While there are two competing decrees out there, there is no question which one has the greater authority behind it.

The killing of Haman's ten sons was business as usual in those day. This would eliminate any revenge killings, or a coup attempt, someone rising up to vie for his position.

That they are named is significant, as is everything in the inspired Word of God. But how or why we are not sure. One effect of naming names in Scripture is it gives Scripture historical accuracy and authenticity. These are real people in real places known by God and His people.

Notice, everything Haman boasted about is gone.

**Esther 5:11** Haman recounted to them the splendor of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honored him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and the servants of the king.

But the very next day after enduring the humiliation of having to honor Mordecai, he goes home:

**Esther 6:13** Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise men and his wife Zeresh said to him, “If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but will surely fall before him.”

All that was Haman’s is now gone and has gone just as his wife had predicted. The great reversal of Haman’s fortunes is now complete. Haman is classic proof of the Biblical principle that pride goes before the fall (Proverbs 16:18).

His wealth went to Esther, his position went to Mordecai, and his sons were hanged in public disgrace as he was.

### **Deliverance in Susa, 9:11-15.**

Here we move from the more general account to a specific account of what happened just in the citadel of the capital city of Susa, the area of the royal palace and administrative buildings. This gives us a clue that the opposition to the Jews in the seat of government was very strong. One wonders how many of the king’s officials were killed?

Ahasuerus’ offer to Esther may reflect a fear of the Jews coming on him as well. They are a force, or have a force behind them, to be reckoned with. He seems to like to hand out blank checks, he gave one to Haman and now another to Esther.

Esther’s request is strange, she asks for one more day beyond the decree and she limits it to Susa. Some suggest this is unbecoming of her as a woman of character, that perhaps her power has gone to her head or she is showing her dark side in being bloodthirsty, vengeful and vindictive.

But she may have knowledge of the situation the author and we don't. Perhaps the anti-Semitic threat is greater than anyone knew. Who knows how many were still loyal to Haman?

Who knows what the 10 sons had been fomenting during the past ten months in the capital. This is a call for a full and lasting elimination of any threat.

### **Deliverance in the Provinces, 9:16-17.**

Meanwhile out in the provinces. Here is the answer to the king's question back in 9:12.

75,000 men who were intent on killing the Jews were killed in the provinces of the Empire. That averages out to about 600 men per province or about what happened in Susa.

No women or children are named, only armed aggressors. And no plunder was taken, though the decree issued gave them the right to kill women and children and take their possessions.

Three times it is underlined in the text that the Jews didn't take the plunder. This seems a clear allusion back to Saul and his actions. Remember when fighting the Amalekites Saul took spoil that he was not entitled to.

Saul spared the sword and took the spoil. Here the Jews didn't spare the sword and didn't take the spoil. Where Saul failed, Esther and Mordecai and the Jews of Persia obeyed.

There seems to be restraint, they only killed out of self-defense. They only killed those who showed intent to kill them, those who showed hatred of the Jews.

In the greatest of all reversals, the minority Jews gained mastery over their great enemies in the Empire. The long-dreaded day is over, everything has changed, and turned 180 degrees. What was feared with a great fear, is now turned to a great joy and relief.

### **Implications and application.**

Five spiritual applications.

*First, regarding the opening suspense.* In one sense, the deliverance of God's people is never in question. God has promised to take care of His people, to never leave them or forsake them.

God is fully capable of doing exactly what He says He will even centuries after He says it. God's Word has power and efficacy, it accomplishes what it says it will.

Does this encourage you? Our lives are always full of drama, of ups and downs, twists and turns, one minute we are going along just great and the next everything seems to be falling apart. But God always knows the outcome, there are no surprises for God and He is in control.

There is no suspense to God how our live is going to go and how it is going to end. He knows the beginning from the end, He is from everlasting to everlasting, always the same.

When we are in the middle of our story, it can be scary, our enemies can seem great and many. But we should never judge by appearances or feelings. God is the God of great reversals. God is the God who can take the worst things and turn them for good. In the end Jesus wins.

***Second, regarding the threat of genocide.*** The sad reality is this is the condition of the human heart as has been attested to again and again in the past century. Hundreds of thousands and millions of people have been killed in Russia, Germany, Cambodia, Africa, Bangladesh, and the on-going conflict between Muslim sects.

Genocide in the Balkans and Rwanda and Darfur. It is going on today in the Middle East and in SE Asia and Myanmar.

But there have also been great reversals. The fall of communism in Poland, in Romania, and throughout eastern Europe was fueled by Christian faith—and the human desire for freedom kindled by that faith. We have witnessed the rise and fall of ISIS. The fall of an authoritarian Islamist regimes should not be beyond our hopes and prayers.

The people of Iran are disillusioned with Islam and the Iranian dictators, they are turning to Christianity in great numbers. Let us join our prayers with those of our brothers and sisters in Iran—for safety, for wisdom, and for the conversion of many more to freedom in Jesus Christ.

***Third, there is a spiritual application of the killing of Haman's ten sons.*** We are all in a spiritual war against sin. Our war is a holy war, there are to be no survivors in our battle against sin and evil. We cannot leave some still alive and well. Our warfare is spiritual and our weapons are spiritual. Our enemies are the world, the flesh and the devil.

We live in a world where there are two decrees, one for our death and one for our life, but the one for our life is from the king of kings. Our Savior is a warrior Savior who fights on our behalf. Our victory comes in dependence on Him and His Holy Spirit.

***Fourth, there is a spiritual application of the Jews restraint.*** We are not being conformed to the ways of the world. We are to keep our anger or hatred or bitterness under strict control. Don't give room for Satan, don't return evil for evil, don't give in to revenge or retaliation.

Not only did the Jews master their enemies, but they mastered themselves, the far more difficult thing to do. They exercised self-control, self-restraint.

Just because we have the right to do something, doesn't mean it is right.

***Fifth and finally, there is a question.*** What about when the tables aren't turned and tragedy happens? What about when people have prayed and prayed, and weren't delivered from their enemies? What about those who read Esther and it rings hollow?

What about in WWII when the Jews weren't delivered? God's people have been slaughtered all through the ages and are today. Our world is filled with enemies of God, whether ISIS or cancer.

Where was God when that church was shot up? Where was God when that Amtrak train crashed? Where was God when our loved one died too soon?

At the cross someone could ask, where was God. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" But history is forever marked and changed by that great reversal, an empty tomb reminds us of the power and presence of our God over the deepest and darkest powers of evil and darkness.

Jesus once said don't fear those who can kill the body, fear those who can kill the body and soul. Don't fear the first death, fear the second death. The resurrection takes away our fear of either death. Belief in Jesus Christ assures us of eternal life. Our life is secure in the death of Jesus.

The tables have been turned, the great reversal has been accomplished for us.

We have seen this great reversal. Next time we will see how the great reversal was celebrated and still is celebrated.