

**"Freed Up to Fight Back" - Esther 8:1-17**  
**Wednesday 11/07/18 – Jeff Lyle**

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When Jesus taught His listeners the value of learning how to turn the other cheek, was He instructing us to never, ever fight back? Is pacifism a pillar of the Gospel? A comprehensive view of what the Bible says about fighting back does not leave the Christian in a position of being a doormat to his or her enemies. There are times when God calls us to protect and defend our lives. Scripture even goes so far as to declare that the Lord is “a man of war” (Exodus 15:3). In the continuing story of Esther and the Jews, there is still a date on the calendar when they will be attacked by their enemies. This message reveals the amazing providence of God and how He leads His children to fight back against a hostile assault on their well-being. We can also learn much about how we are to fight our battles.

**I. A Full Reversal of Fortune for Mordecai (1-2)**

**“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. 2 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.”**

This stunning reversal of circumstances is nothing less than a lavish gift of God to faithful Mordecai. He receives the signet ring from the king - the very ring which his now-dead enemy, Haman, once wore. This transfer of power from Haman to Mordecai serves as the final detail in God’s bringing down the proud and exalting the humble. The king must have been amazed to learn that the man who saved his life many years before was also the guardian who raised the Queen during her childhood. This scene serves as a real-life example of what Jesus taught when He said:

*“Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for My name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. 30 But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” - Matthew 19:28-30*

**II. An Abiding Danger for the Jews (3-8)**

**A. The threat had not been removed (3) - “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.”**

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In spite of the miraculous turn of events for Mordecai and Esther, the previously signed death-decree was still in full effect. The people of Persia had been legally allowed the penalty-free option of murdering any Jews that were living throughout the empire. At this time, there were likely one million or more descendants of Abraham living in the Persian Empire. Men, women and children were all aware that they had a death sentence looming over them in just a few months. Though Mordecai and Esther were likely safe within the king's good graces, all other Jews were facing holocaust.

**B. It was not enough to be personally secure (4-6) - "When the king held out the golden scepter to Esther, Esther rose and stood before the king. 5 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. 6 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?"**

Esther offers us a beautiful example of what it means to identify with others in their plight. Esther was safe by virtue of her privileged status as queen. Notice how she does not lose her identity as a Jewess even though she was the highest-ranking woman in the land. She calls all of the endangered Jews "*my people...my kindred*", thus signaling her willingness to be identified with them. She continues her role as an intercessor by asking her husband, the king, to revoke the death-decree that hovers like a cloud of doom over her people. Esther is moved internally for those who stand vulnerable. Her internal compassion results in action. It is not enough for us to feel sorry for the unsaved, the underprivileged, the disenfranchised or the oppressed. We, like Esther, must be willing to identify with them in their pain and loss. Christianity is validated by our loving not in word only, but in our actions on behalf of others who need what we possess.

**C. The king offered a sliver of hope (7-8) - "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. 8 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."**

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The king reveals some details about the law of the land to Esther as she has requested him to reverse his signed decree of death. Esther did not know that, once a Persian king signed a law into effect, it is immediately irreversible, so the current decree of death upon the Jews could not be retracted by the king or anyone else (see Daniel 6:8 & 6:15). Yet the king allows for the enacting of a new law to be written. He is savvy enough to recognize that the original decree left the Jews in the empire absolutely helpless. They were not able to legally defend themselves against the slaughter headed their way. The king offers the possibility of their survival through the legal enacting of a new law which would provide a clause for them to defend themselves against those who would harm them.

**III. A Way of Escape from the Lord (9-14)**

**A. A gentile king helps a Jewish population (9-10) - “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. 10 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...”**

The new law was crafted via a partnership between Mordecai the Jew, as he was previously called, and the Persian cabinet of the king. Just as the original decree went out in all the various languages represented in the empire, this new law followed the same pathway. Everyone throughout the empire would receive the news that the king was enacting a new decree that would favor the Jews and enable them to survive the planned holocaust that Haman devised.

**B. Divine sovereignty partners with human responsibility (11-14) - “...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, 12 on one day throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth**

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**day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. 13 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..."**

Here are the specifics of the king's new law: the Jews were now legally empowered to defend themselves against those who would presume to slaughter them. God's children were now allowed to kill anyone who sought to kill them. They could defend their families and property through use of physical force. Modern-day Christians need to understand that the Bible does not apply the turn-the-other-cheek principle to defending one's self or property. We are not locked into perpetual victimhood via passivity. Also important is the need to recognize that nations are not compelled by Scripture to follow a pacifist response to threats to a nation's well-being. All throughout the Old Testament, we see God calling Israel to subdue hostile nations through warfare. The Book of Ecclesiastes states quite plainly that there is, indeed, "a time to kill". Violent aggression is a sinful characteristic for any individual. However, if violent aggression comes against us, we are allowed to defend our lives and well-being. In Esther's day, the people were now freed-up to fight back.

**C. Appointed destiny intersects human history (15-17) - "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. 16 The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honor. 17 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."**

What unspeakable relief must have found the Jews throughout the empire. Mordecai was publicly exalted in the capital city. The entire Jewish population in the empire was able to declare victory. Astoundingly, this reversal of fortune resulted in many of the Persians becoming proselytes of the Jews as it became clear that the God of the Jews was fighting for His people. From this point forward, the Book of Esther is victory and celebration for the people of God.