

## Dr. Elaine Phillips, Esther, Lecture 4

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We are at this point in King Xerxes' bedroom and Haman has just entered a room where he is arranging the final demise of Mordecai. So, we're going to pick up with verse 6, chapter 6. Regal prerogative meant that the king's concern came first. That the king did not reveal the identity of Mordecai here was providential.

If he had given Haman's influential position, it would have gone ill with Mordecai. The expression, the king delights to honor, lodged firmly in Haman's mind. He first savored it in his heart and then returned to it repeatedly to define precisely which should be done for, as he assumed, him.

The character of Haman is the most transparent one through the entire narrative. Here the audience has a window into his innermost thoughts and we see their overweening pride. Although the NIV translation of verse 7 smooths it out by attaching it to the following verse, in effect it should be read independently.

Haman repeated the phrase, the man the king delights to honor. He relished it and then verse 8 started into the description of the honors he so ardently desired. Continuing to interweave the man whom the king delights to honor.

This was a practice session for him. He would announce it repeatedly and publicly but with reference to Mordecai. In verses 8 and 9, there are three critical aspects to Haman's response to the king.

He repeated each element with increasing detail, making it quite clear that he intended the king to understand the full import of his advice. There was to be a public declaration that symbols of royal power and position were shared by someone of great importance to the king. Both the royal horse and the regal garment were to be ones that the king himself had used.

Investing them with a significant degree of sovereign power. It has been suggested that this parade, as Haman proposed it, was not a parade through the streets but rather a stationary demonstration in the city square. The verbs that are translated as has ridden and led through could equally be understood as to mount, implying the symbolic position to which Haman would be required to raise Mordecai as a public act of honor.

Because this was the horse the king had mounted, the honoree, and Haman intended it to be himself, would share the king's own glory and honor. A crest, literally in the text a crown on the horse's head, was not an unusual ornamentation in Near Eastern

art. Such headpieces appear regularly in Assyrian reliefs from palaces in Nineveh that are on display in the British Museum.

These are on horses' heads. And this pattern continued into the Persian period as reliefs from Persepolis demonstrate. Chapter 6, verse 10.

The king commanded Haman, go at once, get the robe and the horse, and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Do not neglect anything you have recommended. Hearing Mordecai, the Jew must have frozen every fiber of Haman's being.

He despised that name above all others, and Mordecai was the person whose end was, in his mind, tantalizingly close. In the public sphere, the plot turned at this point. There is a great deal, however, that this verse does not say, leaving much to the imagination of the audience.

Questions arise. How did the king know Mordecai was Jewish? And how could he have forgotten that the Jews were doomed to destruction? Now, Mordecai's identity may have been written in the Chronicles, which would be one source, but more likely, the attendants who clearly knew the circumstances filled the king in on this detail as well. Haman had carefully avoided naming the objects of his decree, and the king had turned the whole sordid business over to Haman.

Thus, even though the decree named the Jews, Xerxes may never have bothered to read the text. The events to this point forcefully demonstrated his ability to miss just about everything of significance. The king's parting shot to Haman, not to neglect anything, is literally, do not let anything fall, which is prescient in light of what was forthcoming for Haman himself.

After Haman's extended description, the actual ceremony appears with great economy, as if to suggest that Haman did it as quickly and perfunctorily as possible. The narrator brilliantly leaves to the audience's imagination what the event in the city square was like for both Haman and for Mordecai. While the king may have been unaware of the antipathy between Haman and Mordecai, everyone in the public sphere who watched the spectacle would have known the preceding incidents.

This was the crowning humiliation, as the proclamation was repeated over and over. This was the man the king wished to honor. At the same time, however, it must have felt like a cruel irony to Mordecai because the seemingly inevitable and deadly decree was still very much in effect.

While nothing is noted about Mordecai's response, Haman's flight home was in mourning with a covered head, verse 12, an adumbration of the final covering of his face in chapter seven, verse eight. This indication of mourning contrasted entirely

with what he had anticipated. Haman's description of his humiliation in verse 13 uses the same language that appears with regard to Mordecai's lowest moment, back in Esther chapter four, verse seven.

After hearing his narrative, Zeresh and the advisors, the wise ones here, whose distance from him is indicated by their no longer being called his friends, as in chapter six, they all recognized his fate was sealed. He had begun to fall, and there was no stopping it. The verbal root of *naphal*, which means to fall, occurs three times, the last being the emphatic infinitive absolute with the finite form.

Because Mordecai was Jewish, Haman would not be able to prevail. The next verse skillfully gets the reading audience back to the banquet after this most important tangent. One can just imagine verse 14, the previous scene with Haman's tormented recital of events, perhaps prolonged as each was revisited, and the sobering responses of all his comforters.

Any hope that he might have sought from them was dashed, and it is understandable then if he had not prepared himself in a timely manner for the next banquet. The escort of eunuchs may have been court protocol for someone of Haman's stature, but when they arrived, they found him still in the midst of the agonizing conversation, and they were compelled to hurry him to the queen. Chapter 7, verses 1 and 2. So the king and Haman went to dine with Queen Esther, and as they were drinking wine on that second day, the king again asked, Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given to you.

What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted. If indeed the feast of wine, literally the banquet of wine, was a course toward the end of the meal, there had been a significant amount of time for tension to build. This was the third time the king asked to know Esther's request.

He addressed her directly as Queen Esther and, for the second time, promised to grant her petition entirely. Following the lead of the king, and again perhaps in keeping with court etiquette, Esther shaped all of her responses, which are narrated as a doublet. Esther, the queen, answered and said she shaped it in pairs.

The first set pair includes two conditionals. If I have found favor, O king, in your eyes and if it pleases the king. Even these were exquisite preparations for what followed.

Esther again used the more deferential *found favor* and appealed directly to the king's relationship with her, a factor to which she returned in the next phrase. Knowing that her own life was more significant as far as the king was concerned, she first asked that her life be granted as her petition and then that her people be granted their lives as her request. The king's honor would, after all, be profoundly

damaged if the queen were killed in conjunction with Haman's edict against the Jews.

The next part of her plea, which is verse four, was a masterpiece in diplomacy. She had to set the stage for the accusation of Haman without implicating the king who was to be sure equally culpable in the matter. Haman was the king's choice as second in the realm and the king had granted him free reign to unleash his fury against the Jews.

In declaring, quote, we have been sold, I and my people, close quote Esther identified herself with the Jews, even though she did not yet name them. Her direct quote of the language of the decree did away with any ambiguity. Haman, at this point, would have realized with mounting horror what this meant for him.

In light of the possibility of Haman's having exploited the convenient similarity between the verbs meaning to annihilate and to enslave, recall our discussion from chapter three. Esther's use of the term sold has multiple layers of meaning. They had been delivered over, literally sold, for destruction, a term used repeatedly in God's response to Israel's disobedience. They had literally been sold as Haman had offered the king money for their annihilation, and Xerxes appears to have accepted.

And the king may have been sold a bill of goods by the deceitful pun that Haman made, lulling him into thinking that this was a matter of slave trade. Even sale into slavery, Esther maintained, would have been sufficiently tolerable that she would have kept quiet. The final clause of this verse is difficult because the three keywords have multiple and ambiguous meanings, perhaps for the very reason that this had to be the epitome of diplomatic language on the part of Esther.

A literal rendition of this clause would be, quote, there is no calamity or adversary, the word is tsar, that is equivalent to damage to the king, close quote. If tsar referred to a person, it would be a disdainful comment on Haman. He was so worthless that disrupting the royal equilibrium in order to accomplish his punishment would be too high a price, implying utmost respect for the king and utmost contempt for Haman.

The Hebrew verse five literally reads, then said King Ahasuerus, and he said to Queen Esther, who is he? Where is he who has filled his heart to do such a thing? The awkward repetition of said in the opening part of that verse is not a textual error, as many have suggested. Instead, it works very well to indicate the sputtering of the king. He was so shocked that he had to catch his breath and start all over again.

Both the description of his talking, as well as his direct question, indicated his dismay. Notably, the king did not recognize the language in the decree or make the connection between Esther's reference and Haman. Because he had been negligent

in knowing about Haman's real activities and the identity of his queen, he asked the question that allowed Esther to point directly at Haman.

She started verse six with general terms, a man, an adversary, an enemy, and then proceeded to this evil Haman. It was a terse indictment. She called him an enemy, not the enemy of the Jews, thus intimating it was a much bigger problem.

In effect, Haman was a traitor to the king as well as an enemy of the Jews. It was horrifying news to Haman that the queen was Jewish and therefore condemned, in effect, by his edict to die. Face to face with the king and the queen, who are noted together at this point, Haman was gripped with sudden terror.

The next events are compressed. His fate was quickly sealed. Obviously, this revelation infuriated the king.

He had been duped by Haman in more ways than one, and Esther's own subterfuge might have irritated him to a degree. How humiliating that his own queen identified herself with a people officially consigned to destruction. His enraged exit matched his character.

The Hebrew is what might be called a dramatic ellipsis. Quote, he got up in his rage from the wine course to the palace garden, suggesting both haste and confusion. Haman turned to Esther to plead for his life.

The king's mind was made up, but perhaps Haman hoped that the king again would not act on his own. If so, Esther was his only very slim hope. In the final irony of Haman's life, he fell onto the couch where Esther, the Jewish queen, was reclining.

And in that posture of entreaty when the king returned and found him there. Whether the king deliberately misinterpreted this action or actually thought Haman was assaulting Esther is unclear. To violate the queen would have been tantamount to tyranny, a practice that is evident at other points in Israel's history when potential usurpers of the throne slept with concubines.

What the king saw allowed him to make a charge that would resolve his dilemma about the dishonorable implications of him for the edict. Everything could be blamed on Haman. Further, a sensitive reading of this text might raise the question as to Esther's complicity in Haman's precarious position.

Perhaps in the king's absence, she duplicitously invited Haman to her, but in order to seal his fate. In any case, in a tidy demonstration of measure for measure justice, Haman would die because of a false accusation, just as he had falsely accused the Jews. The extreme brevity of the narrative at this point suggests the blur of activity and haste with which these traumatic last moments of Haman's life passed.

As in numerous earlier instances, the indefinite plural subject indicates passive. Haman's face was covered. In verse 9, we read about Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king, who said, a gallows 75 feet high stands by Haman's house.

He had it made for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king. The king said, hang him on it. So, they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai.

Then, the king's fury subsided. Given its excessive size, the pole that Haman had hastily erected could not be missed. Undoubtedly, curious inquiries prompted Haman to disclose his intent to get rid of Mordecai.

Harbona was shrewd, and having heard what had happened in the interval to both Haman and Mordecai, he weighed in against the man whose star was falling. And his words resolved a possibly ticklish situation for the king. His words supplied a second reason for effecting the death penalty against Haman, reminding the cluster of eunuchs and other court functionaries that Mordecai had just been celebrated as a benefactor of the king.

Attacking someone of that stature was deadly business. Xerxes commanded that Haman be hung. Haman's fall was completed when his body was hoisted, ironically, on the pole for the final humiliation.

The measure-for-measure justice is also noted. He was hung on the pole he had prepared for Mordecai. Nevertheless, even though this king was superficially concerned to operate according to the law, one of the charges against Haman was, contrary to appearances, not true.

The significance of the king's anger subsiding must also not be overlooked. It meant that his attention was focused solely on the events and persons as they affected him. The fate of Haman, whose plot had threatened the king's own honor, was sealed.

The fate of Esther's people, still unresolved, at this point did not concern him. In chapter 8, Esther's identities, right at the outset, as ruling queen, recipient of what had been Haman's estate, and cousin of the honored benefactor of the king, all converged at this point. Whereas the king's previous recognition of Mordecai had been a temporary display, at this point he came into the presence of Xerxes, a place reserved for very few.

He was given both Haman's political power, indicated by the signet ring, probably retrieved by the king in a moment of lucidity, and Haman's economic resources, because he was appointed custodian over Haman's estate. But still the Jews were in jeopardy. So, verse 3, Esther again pleaded with the king, falling at his feet and weeping.

She begged him to put an end to the evil plan of Haman the Agagite, which he had devised against the Jews. It's possible that this next scene was a continuation of the same day's events. In that case, the Hebrew idiom she added and spoke would suggest a continuation of the high-level political exchanges that had already taken place.

It seems more likely, however, that some time had elapsed. The quick succession of events necessary for that reconstruction does not seem like the court was governed by excessive protocol. Further, the reference in verse 9 to writing a counter-decree in the third month also suggests significant delay, during which time Esther and Mordecai may have grown increasingly anxious because they saw nothing transpiring regarding the fate of the Jews.

Thus, Esther again faced the prospect of entering the king's presence unannounced, uncertain as to whether he would extend to her the golden scepter. Her impassioned appeal was marked this time by falling at his feet, weeping and imploring him for mercy, particularly with regard to the diabolical scheme of Haman. This posture is noticeably different from her first entreaty.

In that case, she stood at a distance, and only when the king extended the scepter did she approach and touch it. In verse 5, she said, if it pleases the king and if he regards me with favor, and thinks it the right thing to do, and if he's pleased with me, let an order be written overruling the dispatches that Haman, son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, devised and wrote to destroy the Jews in all the provinces. For how can I bear to see disaster falling on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family? Esther's artful plea, initiated with a four-part formula instead of two, appealed both to what was recognizably good, tov, and right, kasher, like kosher, as well as to the king's regard for her.

Each of these aspects appeared twice, and her appeal to goodness took priority in each set. Her reference to what was right implied that the previous decree decidedly was not. In requesting that the evil decree of Haman be revoked, she followed good court form.

Let it be written to cause to return the dispatches, literally. Followed by a full further naming of Haman. These carefully chosen words got the king off the hook, even though the dispatches had been issued in his name, and again put the blame for the edict squarely on Haman, now deceased.

It's important to note that her initial and primary request was the revocation of the decree. When that was refused, other means, more violent, had to be adopted. When we come to verse seven, titles are obviously important.

Esther is called the queen. Mordecai is called the Jew. The word order of the king's response in Hebrew may hint at a slight degree of exasperation with this further request.

He front-loaded his own actions of justice, saying, look, I gave Haman's estate to Esther. He's been hung. Implicit in that might have been, what more do you want? Or perhaps another interpretation in his words, quote, Haman is completely off the scene.

You're free to do what you want to do. With verse eight, we see he begins to address both of them. You, plural, right, concerning the Jews, whatever seems good to you.

This suggests that Xerxes wanted nothing more to do with the affair. That would fit as comprehensive indifference to anything that did not directly impinge on his personal world. The last part of the verse is interesting, however.

Seal it with the king's signet ring. No document written in the king's name and sealed with his ring can be revoked. Referring again to the irrevocability.

This may simply be, in this case, a bit of a realistic assessment. After all, runners had gone out to the entire kingdom, giving permission to act on well-entrenched prejudices. How could the effects of such a decree ever be presented? The only recourse might have been the one he chose.

The narrative regarding the issuance of this decree, which will be the next verses, nine through 14, bears distinct verbal parallels to the first decree and its surroundings in chapter three, verses 12 through 15. In other words, this was explicitly a countermeasure. Having said that, the changes are also noteworthy.

This one was in accordance with everything that Mordecai, now in Haman's position, commanded. The very first recipients on the list were Jews, absent from the preceding role of addressees. Even though the Jewish population, of course, quickly became aware of the first decree, it was the intent of its malevolent framer that they be excluded and, therefore, caught unprepared.

In this decree, the rest of the address list was compressed, and the presumptuous titles were removed. An additional subtle change from the preceding edict is that the verb forms are active. Mordecai took responsibility.

He wrote it in the name of the king. He sealed it with the ring. He sent it by means of government couriers.

In contrast to the previous decree, however, these couriers had excellent horsepower at their disposal. They rode the best horses the government could

provide. Mordecai's edict, verse 11, said that the king gave permission to the Jews in every city to organize themselves in order to take action and to literally stand for their lives.

The rest of the verse, verse 11, has prompted extensive commentary, particularly the reference to little children and women, *taph nashim*, which syntactically can be read as either the potential objects of Jewish action or as Jewish women and children attacked by enemy forces. To determine which interpretation is better, it is important to note the critical contrasts with the preceding decree as well as the terms that have been carried over precisely. In the prior edict, the objects to destroy, kill, and annihilate were, quote, all the Jews from young to old, little children and women.

In Mordecai's decree, the same three infinitives from the first decree have as their immediate objects, quote, every armed force, *hel*, of people and province attacking them, followed by little children and women. In each case, little children and women is not connected by a conjunction to what is preceded. That makes it ambiguous.

In the first decree, they clearly represented the most vulnerable objects of enemy attack. Here, these words immediately follow those attacking them, suggesting the Jews were given permission to kill those in every location still intent on carrying out the original decree by, quote, attacking them, their women, and their children. Because the direct focus of Jewish self-defense was armed adversaries, it is illogical to think that the government mandate would be issued against those least likely to be in that category.

A further direct quote of the previous edict comes at the very end with the permission to take plunder. Given the fact that the following narrative is emphatic that the Jews did not take plunder, even though permitted to do so, it seems that if there had been a legal allowance to slaughter women and children, some comment would have been made in that regard as well. There's no such summary.

Instead, in chapter nine, the text says how many men were killed in Susa, 802 days, and how many enemies throughout the empire, 75,000. In sum, Mordecai cited specific phrases from the previous decree to emphasize that this was specifically, again, a countermeasure. Because of the irrevocability of these laws, the terms of the second edict had to reflect those of the first as protection for the Jews.

Both the description of the circumstances and the text itself substantiate the claim that the Jews were not given wholesale permission to slaughter. Instead, they were to respond to provocations that came as a result of those acting on the first decree. But I need to say at this point that most interpreters go with it the other direction in terms of how to read little women and children, little children and women.

Moving ahead, verse 12 reiterates that this would occur in all the royal provinces. And then the edict closed with the already established date, the 13th day of Adar. In verse 13, the text of the first edict is reproduced with two additions.

First, the Jews were to be ready for this day. And second, they were to be ready in order, quote, to be avenged from their enemies, close quote. Whereas the interpretive problems with verse 11, with which we've just dealt, stem from syntactical ambiguity, this one is blatantly troubling.

There's nothing that seems more foreign to a Christian worldview than vengeance. Nevertheless, several important observations are in order. The Hebrew root *nakam* and its related verbal and noun forms refer not only to personal revenge, which is, of course, reprehensible but also to God's vengeance, which is necessary in an evil world.

Vengeance is an action that first presupposes a wrong and then sets it right. It is distinctly and appropriately punitive and is therefore ultimately a source of encouragement for those who suffer unjustly. While God himself most frequently executes vengeance, there are occasions where he uses agents.

Haman's crime against the Jews was heinous, all the more so because its effects did not cease with his death. The edict was designed to unleash pogroms across the empire. To be avenged here meant for the Jews to be vindicated and to live instead of to die.

Verse 15, chapter 8. Mordecai left the king's presence wearing royal garments of blue and white, a large crown of gold and purple robe of fine linen, and the city of Susa held a joyous celebration. For the Jews, it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honor. In every province and in every city, wherever the edict of the king went, there was joy and gladness among the Jews with feasting and celebration, and many other people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them.

Mordecai's sackcloth and ashes of chapter 4 and the temporary robe from chapter 6 were replaced with permanent accoutrements of royalty. What Haman had craved, Mordecai was given and, in fact, given in abundance. One robe became an entire ensemble, and instead of a paltry crown and a horse's head, Mordecai wore his own large golden crown.

Even so, a distinction is maintained between this diadem of gold, a *teret zahav*, and the crown worn by the Persian royalty, *ketur machut*. In fact, the narrator may have subtly emphasized Mordecai's Jewishness at this point, as *atara* is the word most frequently used in the Hebrew Bible for royal diadem. In contrast to mourning, fasting, weeping, and wailing that we saw in chapter 4, now the Jews had light,

gladness, rejoicing, and honor, and the spontaneous joy turned to an outright holiday with its own accompanying *mishte*, feast, banquet, for the Jewish communities everywhere.

The people of the land, plural, *ameha aretz*, refers to non-Jews, and here it indicates those who chose to identify themselves with the Jews. Just what that identification meant, however, is a question. The word *mit yahadim* occurs only in Esther, and here it was a direct response to dread of the Jews falling on them.

The same dread is noted in Esther chapter 9, verse 2, along with dread of Mordecai in verse 3. Both the noun and the verb forms of *pahad* indicate intense and sudden fear to the point of trembling, and they appear predominantly, although not exclusively, in prophetic and poetic texts with reference to dread of the Lord or a nameless, numinous terror. This may, therefore, indicate that this identification was prompted by something more than simply political security, although that may have been part of it. On the other hand, it's uncertain that true conversion was implied here.

Perhaps the best interpretation was that they professed to be Jews for a wide variety of motives, one of which may have been fear of the God of the Jews. In the record of Jewish self-defense and relief from enemies, chapter 9, verses 1 through 17, it's important to be sensitive to the time frames of the text. The first 10 verses of chapter 9 describe the events of day one.

The Hebrew text in verse 1 highlights the date and the developing tension with one complex sentence. Because the two conflicting decrees established this day, the resulting bloodshed was inevitable, and there are key stylistic indicators in the Hebrew text of impending crisis. Even though there were two edicts issued in the name of the king, the expression here is singular.

Each side could appeal to the word of the king. The hope of the enemies of the Jews to dominate them was matched as the Jews dominated those who hated them. The centerpiece between these two statements is the Hebrew word, *it was overturned*, emphasizing complete reversal and summarizing the victory to be described.

At the same time, the bitter truth was that the deadly edict issued by Haman was not overturned in the same way that the gallows intended for Mordecai was revisited, or the honor that Haman planned for himself was given to Mordecai. God did not intervene directly and eradicate the existing decree. Instead, it had to be overturned with armed battles, which were costly.

It's telling that there were significant numbers of those who had hoped to overpower the Jews. The Jews had been given, verse 2, the right to organize, to be assembled

together in order to stand for their lives. As the events unfolded on the 13th of Adar, they attacked those who sought their harm.

In fact, no one could stand against them. This suggests the possibility of offensive action on the part of the Jews. The language accurately portrays the complexity and messiness of situations such as these.

Just as the common folk dreaded the Jews, verses 3 and 4, leadership at every rank had also come to dread Mordecai. As a result of his decree, attacking the Jews was no longer officially sponsored. In fact, Mordecai's decree commanded authorities to permit Jews to defend themselves.

Chapter 9, verse 5, is central in the ethical discussion that continues to rage over the events at the end of Esther. Simply put, does this verse say that there was a massacre of Gentiles that was no different from any other ethnically based offensive? There are those who claim that it was indeed a harsh preemptive strike. After the second decree, no one would have been intent on attacking the Jews, they claim.

Instead, the Jews struck all their enemies. There was wholesale killing and destruction of life, and they did as they pleased. The bad part of this verse is to their foes.

That last has an undefined but very repugnant sound to it. Nevertheless, this attack, for such it was, was a response to those who had attacked them and who were intent on their harm and who viewed this as an occasion for their complete destruction. The offensive action of the Jews was necessary in light, again, of the irrevocable decree that officially sanctioned their demise.

The unfolding of these events intimates that there was a strong anti-Semitic sentiment that had been brewing all along. The victims of the Jews were noted as enemies, those who hated them, and men. Once the bloodshed subsided, the narrative repeatedly emphasizes that the Jews got rest from their enemies.

It's mentioned three times. The relief was palpable. If the 500 men in verse 6 killed in Susa represented those who had attacked Jews, there was great hostility to Jews right in the capital.

There are those who view this number and the figures that follow as further indications of exaggerations. It is very likely, however, that long-festering hatred, having been nurtured by the leadership, had a life of its own quite apart from rationality. It blazed in the Persian street, we might say, after Haman's death.

In chapters, chapter 9, verses 7 through 10, in the Hebrew text, the names of Haman's sons, as they are hung, are placed in two columns, possibly an illusion by ancient copyists of their ultimate suspension on poles. The sons may have attacked Jews to avenge their father's death, and as a result lost their own lives. They may also have been leaders in an anti-Jewish and anti-Mordecai insurgence.

The name and honor of Haman would have been carried on by his descendants. Thus, this action, as spelled out here, cut off Haman's posterity, and the point is driven home at this point by reiterating the title that had defined his presence in the book. Haman, son of Hammedatha, adversary of the Jews.

Publicly hanging their bodies was a necessary form of humiliation. And again, finally, three separate statements stress that the Jews did not lay their hands on the enemy's plunder, demonstrating extraordinary restraint. Verses 11 through 14 of chapter 9 are a conference between the king and Esther.

In reporting to Queen Esther, the king repeated the Susa casualty list in the same words that it was originally narrated in chapter 9, verse 6, followed by the specific reference to the sons of Haman. The next clause about the rest of the provinces, rather than being a direct question, might rather be something along the lines of, I wonder what they've done in the rest of the provinces. They is ambiguous here.

It could refer either to the adversarial forces or to the Jews, or to both. The uncertainty embedded in the question, along with the unexpectedly large numbers in Susa, may have contributed to the king's reiteration of his promise to grant Esther further action. Perhaps it had begun to dawn on him that this was an exceedingly serious problem for him as well as for the Jews.

A hint of Esther's boldness in verses 13 through 14 may lie in the fact that she no longer prefaced her request with a twofold condition, including an appeal to the king's attachment to her. This time she simply said, if it seems good to the king. From this point on, two issues intertwine in the narrative developments.

First, it was evident that the threat of hostility still lingered. Deterrent action was advisable. Second, from the standpoint of legislation, the two-day festival had to have a firm foundation.

The latter has its beginnings here and has expanded considerably in the rest of the chapter. Regarding the former, both the initial decree of Haman and Mordecai's counter decree had limited the fighting to one day. The day had come and gone with the Jews victorious, as far as they knew, only in the fighting sufficiently fierce that 500 men were killed there.

Esther's request may have been formulated within the framework of the continuing uncertainty. Just as the report dealt with the citadel and Haman's 10 sons, so also did her request, although the first expanded to the entirety of Susa. Both parts of the plan were designed to forestall further attacks.

In Susa, the Jews could act the following day, according to the law of today, which meant self-defense when attacked, and the bodies of Haman's sons would be hoisted high on poles. What they did not know at that point was the extent of Jewish resistance throughout the empire. Those figures, no doubt, came in slowly.

As events unfolded in Susa into the 14th day, verses 16 and 17, the narrative resumes its summary of the confrontations empire-wide that had indeed occurred the previous day, even though those results may not have been known at that time. The rest of the Jews organized and, again, stood for their lives. The theme of rest, again, resounds in the next three verses.

That the text is so emphatic in this regard is a commentary on the fierceness of the anti-Jewish sentiment that compelled 75,000 persons empire-wide to act with sufficient aggression towards the Jews that they got themselves killed. Just as relief is emphasized, so also is the fact, again, that the Jews did not take any plunder, even though they had been permitted to do so by the measure-for-measure form. In spontaneous response to the great relief, the day was marked with feasting and joy.

These two features would characterize the subsequent formally established institution of the festival. Already, after Mordecai's elevation and the issuance of the decree, rejoicing occurred and honor was restored for the Jews. There had continued to be, however, a cloud of uncertainty with the edict still impending.

The 13th and 14th of Adar were necessary to accomplish the rest. Now, the rest of the chapter establishes, at great length, the festival. In verse 18, the distinctions between Susa and the vast empire are reiterated.

With verse 20, the focus of the text moves from the narrative of deliverance to rejoicing and rest and, finally, to the means for perpetuating the memory of that tremendous occasion. It appears that the Jews had immediately set aside particular days, and they began doing the observances associated with the festival. It was, however, with an intent to preserve the memory that Mordecai wrote, both verse 20 and verse 23, these matters of Purim, and they were established, confirmed, and imposed.

The repetitious element in these verses and the general tangle of language to the rest of the chapter to establish this new tradition come together in a remarkably apt form to convey the monumental effort to confirm the observance of Purim, a festival not noted again in the revelation from Sinai. The two-part statement in verse 22

engaged Jewish memories of the roots of the festival. Echoing key words, it harked back to the days when they got rest from their enemies, to the month of the great turnabout, chapter 9, verse 1. Subsequent generations were to celebrate these days with the same vitality and in the same manner as those original communities who experienced deliverance.

In verse 24, we have another document, a public document, in which Mordecai demonstrated that he was an exceedingly skillful diplomat. This text is very compressed. It fully implicates Haman while carefully reshaping the king's part in the events in order to present him, not Mordecai and Esther, as the hero of the narrative.

This was a delicately executed maneuver to restore the significantly tarnished honor of the king. And again, it is a compression. Mordecai subtly put together his own written decree issued in the name of the king to counter Haman's edict and the king's command to display the bodies of Haman and his 10 sons.

With verses 26 through 27, there's another summary statement ostensibly to bring further focus to the flurry of details that lay behind the legislation for the new festival. Mordecai oversaw the distribution of a second letter, which is mentioned in verse 29, as he did a preceding one mentioned in verse 20. And then, finally, this distribution noted in verse 30 refers to the 127 provinces again, which balances their mention from chapter 1. Both shalom, peace and truth were fundamentally significant concepts in the biblical worldview.

It may be that part of the forceful and authoritative tone of these texts for the Jewish communities also is the result of their being laced with already existing biblical language. Mordecai used words of peace and truth, verse 30, and he set widely flung Jewish communities at ease. These words echo Zechariah chapter 8, verse 19.

The people had been through disruptions and traumas caused by insidious lying. By contrast, shalom, related to the verbal root shalem, implies setting manners right by means of recompense. Thus, the victory of the Jews had contributed in some small way to the writing of the social order.

And finally, with chapter 10, verses 1 through 3, we have appropriate closure to the text. Xerxes and his power are reiterated. They're restored after having experienced shockwaves, but also Mordecai is referenced as someone who shares authority and gives good advice to Xerxes.

He assists the king in creating a system for economic stability. His prominent position sets the stage for the historical roles of Ezra and Nehemiah, who would follow him. He continued as an advocate and spokesperson in the government for the Jewish community, and the text closes with Mordecai speaking shalom for all his

descendants, a poignant reminder of the necessity for Jews throughout succeeding centuries to have someone able to intercede for their well-being.