

The Jews Struck Down All Their Enemies with the Sword, Killing and Destroying Them

9: 5-19

DIG: What does they did as they pleased mean in the context here? What happened in the fortress of Susa? Why? What did the Jews do with the plunder? Why? What did Queen Esther ask for and receive from King Ahasuerus? How was it possible that the Jews killed seventy-five thousand of their enemies? Why are there two different dates for the observance of Purim?

REFLECT: What is the difference between killing and murder (see my commentary on Exodus Dp - You Shall Not Murder)? What do you do that's not for money? Even though you know you will be criticized, will you do something tough for the LORD in your life (that you know needs to be done)? Or do you usually pass? Do you know why? Are you feeling like you are living in a walled (protected) city today, or do you feel like you are living in an unwalled (unprotected) city? Why?

On the day of the battle, on the twenty-third day of the third month, the month of Sivan, 474 BC, the Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and they did what they pleased to those who hated them (9:5). Perhaps the words, they did as they pleased to those who hated them, suggests a frenzy of wild vengeance because of the combination of the verbs. In the wider context, however, the inference is that the Jews were given a free hand to defend themselves without official interference from the government.

The Jews must have had many enemies in the fortress of Susa, because they killed and destroyed five hundred men plus Haman's ten sons (9:6). Maybe Haman had influenced them. Probably the Jews of Susa concentrated on the enemies that were found in the fortress as being the most dangerous, or perhaps the known enemies of the Jews sought refuge in the fortress to try to protect themselves. Although five hundred sounds like a lot, it was not a high percentage of the population. This points to the fact that the majority of the citizens of Susa supported the Jews.

But they did not lay their hands on the plunder as Haman had hoped to do. Three times it is stated that **they** were not doing this for the money (9:10b, 15-16). The author may also have had the incident in **First Samuel 15:17-23** in mind when Saul disobeyed ADONAI by taking the plunder of the Amalekites. This time **the Jews** were careful not to make the same mistake again. In addition, the decision not to enrich **themselves** at the expense of **their enemies** would not go unnoticed in a culture where victors were *expected* to take the spoil. The very novelty of such restraint would be talked about, remembered and taken as proof of their upright motives, probably resulting in *Gentile* converts to Judaism.¹⁰⁵

The number of those killed in the fortress of Shushan was reported to the king that same day (9:11). The king seemed indifferent to the results. The number of those killed did not include any **Jews**. It must simply be that the victory over **their enemies** made the loss of **their** own companions seemingly insignificant by comparison. But it is hard to believe that not one **Jewish** life was lost, although the narrative would have us think so. Maybe the mention of **Jewish** deaths would put a damper on the **Jewish Marti Gras** known as **Purim**. **The Jews** had but one thought that day, and it was survival.

The Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, "The Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men and the ten sons of Haman in the fortress of Susa. Apparently the king was indifferent to the results. **What have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? If the Jews killed so many in Susa, how many must they have been killed in the whole empire? Now what is your petition? It will be given you** (but this time he did not add, **up to half the kingdom**). **What is your request? It will also be granted"** (9:12).

She requested one more **day** to root out **the enemies of the Jews** who were trying to destroy **them**, and the public humiliation of the bodies of **Haman's ten dead sons**, just as **their father** had been humiliated. Although barbaric by our standards today, it was a common occurrence in ancient warfare (**First Samuel 31:1-3**). Esther replied: **If it pleases the king, give the Jews in Susa permission to carry out this day's edict tomorrow also, and let Haman's ten sons be impaled on poles** (9:13). Esther is almost universally condemned for requesting the fighting to go on for a second **day**. The author, however, makes no attempt to either exonerate **the queen** or to justify **her request**. It seemed to be perfectly acceptable to him. Did **she** let **her** newfound power go to **her** head? Or were **her** reasons for requesting a second **day** of fighting legitimate, even though they are unknown to us and possibly unknown to the author? We simply don't know.

Whether or not **Esther** was justified or not, the perennial failure of Israel's greatest leaders to war against moral and spiritual darkness without being engulfed in it themselves suggests that no human being is worthy to wage a true holy war in the name of YHWH. God's strategy against sin and evil was awaiting the perfect Warrior (see **Bj - The Jews Rejoiced**), who could execute divine justice with clean hands and a pure heart. His name is Jesus.¹⁰⁶

They also killed Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai and Vaizatha, (9:7-9) the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews (9:10a). *The Massorah prescribes that the names of the ten sons of Haman be written in a perpendicular column on the right hand side of the page, with the vav (and) on the left hand side. This is probably derived from the tradition that the ten sons were impaled on a tall pole, one above each other. It is also customary in reading the Megillah on Purim. The rabbis teach that if someone can say all ten of Haman's sons names in one breath (because they all died together), it will bring good luck.*

The ten sons of Haman were also killed that day, leaving no one to carry on their father's legacy of hateful pride. The apple, after all, doesn't fall far from the tree. This was a common practice in ancient warfare. When the leader was killed, so was his whole family so that no one could live on to mount a vengeful coup. The names of **Haman's sons** may help us to better understand what kind of a war **Esther** was engaged in. They are of special interest because they may be *daiva* names of ancient **Persia**. *Daiva* were once used of the gods in early Iranian and Hindu writings but later came to be associated with demonic powers in Eastern religions. As seen above, all the names have a characteristic "a" vowel, in keeping with **their father** and **grandfather's** names, as if binding the entire family together. If the names of **Haman's sons** do reflect this origin, the original readers would have probably recognized **them** as demonic. The author possibly listed the names to show the allegiance of **Haman** and his family to the demonic powers of darkness and evil and, therefore, proper casualties of **Purim**.¹⁰⁷

The Nazi's banned all **Purim** observances. Hitler, on January 31, 1944, said that if the Nazis went down to defeat, **the Jews** would celebrate a second triumphal **Purim**. How right he was! On October 16, 1946, **ten** Nazis were hung in Nuremburg like the **ten sons of Haman**. One of them was Julius Streicher, who said as he was hung, "**Purim**, 1946."¹⁰⁸

So the king commanded that this be done. An edict was issued in Susa, and they impaled the ten sons of Haman (9:14). The Jews in Susa, *probably the center of anti-*

Jewish element, came together on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar, and they put to death in Susa three hundred men who attacked them, but, we are reminded once again that they did not lay their hands on the plunder (9:15). **This number was for the whole city of Susa, is small compared with the five hundred killed in the fortress on the first day. This further proves that the Jews did not kill indiscriminately, but only those who attacked them.**

Meanwhile, the remainder of the Jews who were in the king's provinces also assembled to protect themselves and get relief from their enemies. They killed seventy-five thousand of them (9:16a). **Another detail that has been considered improbable is that the Jews killed seventy-five thousand of their enemies after the king's second edict.** To those who have doubts about the possibility of such a massacre of their enemies, Carl Friedrich Keil, the famous messianic **Jew** from Germany (1807-1888) reminds us of the massacre of St. Bartholomew in France when Carlos IX put thousands of Protestants to death and banished hundreds of thousands from France. He also notes that Ferdinand the Catholic banished three hundred thousand **Jews** from Spain. Keil suggests that the population of the **Persian** Empire from Ethiopia to India must have been at least one hundred million. **The Jews** must have numbered between two and three million. So perhaps the number of anti-Semites killed need not be considered so improbable.¹⁰⁹

Even after the death of **Haman**, his edict of destruction remained in force for **the Jews**. But the counter-decree (see **Bi - Now Write a Counter-Decree in the King's Name in Behalf of the Jews**) by **Ahasuerus** gave **the Jews** the right to defend themselves and their property in the face of deadly assault (8:11). While it is true that many **Persians** died in their attack on **the Jews**, their deaths were not the result of **Jewish** aggression, but of **Jewish** self-defense! None of the **Persians** would have died if they had refrained from attacking **the Jews**. Their integrity in this manner is emphasized by the repeated statement from 9:10, "But did not lay their hands on the plunder" (9:16b). **The Jews** refused to enrich themselves through their victory over **the Persian** aggressors.¹¹⁰

This happened on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar. The feast was observed on the thirteenth of Adar, or the original day set for the slaughter of **the Jews**. This was done in all the provinces. And on the fourteenth they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy (9:17). Apart from the Feast of Dedication and Nicanor's Day, both instituted in the mid-second century BC, there were no festivals during the last five months of the Hebrew calendar (February to March). By the middle of the last month of the year a reason for family rejoicing would be a welcomed highlight after a long, cold winter.

The first observance of Purim took place on the **fourteenth of Adar** outside the capital city of **Susa**. This verse is a kind of parenthetical explanation. **Verse 19** explains how this feast was observed in **the villages** and *unwalled towns*. **That is why rural Jews- those living in villages** and large towns without walls - **observe the fourteenth of the month of Adar as a day of joy and feasting, a good day for giving presents to each other (9:19)**. It was a **day of joy**, instead of a day of sorrow; it was a **day of feasting**, instead of a day of fasting; it was a **good day**, instead of a day of mourning; and it was a **day for giving presents to each other**, instead of having things taken away from them.¹¹¹

However, **the second observance of Purim** took place on the **fifteenth of Adar** because they fought for another day (see *By - Susa Purim*). **The Jews in Susa had assembled on the thirteenth and fourteenth of Adar, and then on the fifteenth of Adar they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy (9:18)**. This set the stage for different Jewish observances. To this day, those **Jews living in villages** without walls celebrate **Purim on the fourteenth of Adar**, but those in cities *with walls* celebrate it on **the fifteenth of Adar**. Always being different, the Samaritans observed this feast a month earlier, in the month of *Sh'vat*. These last two verses are summaries that may seem to be contradictory to other verses, **9:21-22** for example. These summaries, however, *telescope* the events. That is to say, they are too brief to give all the details that would show they are not contradictory.

Consequently, a plot to destroy **the Jews of Persia** resulted in a festival that helped to unite and sustain **them as a people**.