

# Queen Esther and Mordecai Wrote a Second Letter to Confirm the Feast of Purim 9: 29-32

**DIG:** What was the purpose of this second letter? Who wrote it? Why was that so important? Queen Esther is named as the daughter of Abihail here in this letter, how did that contrast with the first time we met her (see 2:7a and c, 2:15a). What was confirmed in the letter? Under what authority? Why was that important?

**REFLECT:** How is the male and female partnership in God's providence seen in your life? How do you feel about the reversal of roles between Esther and Mordecai throughout the book? Are you comfortable with that? Or does it bother you? Why? How much does it mean to you that this is a biblical account opposed to a secular one (Second Timothy 3:16)? If this story was in the context of a church or messianic synagogue would that be different (see my commentary on **Genesis Lv - I Do Not Permit a Woman to Teach or Have Authority Over a Man, She Must Be Silent**)?

This was the second letter of Purim. Mordecai wrote the first letter (9:20-22), and Esther wrote this one. The purpose of her letter was to reinforce the official authority for the institution of the feast of Purim. At this point in the story all the conflicts have been resolved, and the characters are out of danger. In this section the meaning of the events are being summarized in a form seen throughout the Bible. All the events of this story have led up to the point of understanding why Purim is celebrated and why it is such a joyous occasion.<sup>123</sup>

So Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail, along with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority, or *power*, to confirm this second letter concerning Purim. The Hebrew is clear in using the third person singular, feminine form of the verb **wrote**, making it clear that Esther is the one who writes this final confirmation of Purim. At the beginning of her story, Esther is referred to as Mordecai's cousin whom he had adopted as his own daughter when her father (Mordecai's uncle Abihail) and mother died (2:7a and c, 2:15a). At the end of her story, however, the Jewish identity and Persian position are combined in the reference to her as Queen Esther (9:29). Esther was giving official governmental approval to the Feast of Purim, confirming what the author sees as a community decision having already taken place.<sup>124</sup>

And Mordecai, as prime minister, sent copies of Esther's letter to all the Jews in the 127 provinces of Ahasuerus' kingdom, or the Persian Empire. The letter was introduced with words of goodwill and assurance (9:30). Therefore, it has become customary to unroll the whole *Megillah* before reading it, to give the appearance of a letter.

The second letter from Queen Esther confirmed the feast and Mordecai's first letter. The subjects of King Ahasuerus were to establish these days of Purim at their designated times. The first tradition was decreed for them by Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther (9:31a).

The Queen confirmed that they had already established for themselves and their descendants, times of, literally, *words of fasting and lamentation* in association with Purim (9:31b), based on (4:3 and 16). In Jewish history there had been a time of fasting related to the joyous celebration of Purim. In Talmud times it was known as a three-day fast and observed after the feast of Purim. From the ninth century AD, the day before the feast of Purim (the thirteenth day of Adar) has been observed as a day of fasting.<sup>125</sup>

So the command of Esther confirmed the practices of Purim (9:32a NLT). A similar grammatical oddity points to the unity of authorship. The word **command**, from the Hebrew means *to speak, promise, command*, is only found in Esther 1:15, 2:20 and here in the entire TaNaKh. In view of the fact that it is such a rare word, its use in 1:15 does appear to be a deliberate comparison between the command of King Ahasuerus there, and the command of [Queen] Esther here.<sup>126</sup> She confirmed all that Mordecai had wrote about the observance of Purim. The feast was then given royal authority by the hand of Queen Esther, so it had the status and protection of Persian law. **Providence!**

Furthermore, it was all written down in the book (9:32b). It is not clear what book this refers to. It might be the book of the chronicles, the record of the kingdom of Persia mentioned earlier (6:1). The importance of the written document cannot be overstated. It authorized the feast for future generations. In Esther, written decrees were necessary to make them lawful, and once written in the king's name they became irrevocable. In a humorous picture of the infamous red tape of the Persian court, one Targum of Esther says that women of the king's harem were summoned to his bed by written memo! Anyway, the written word in Esther not only had authority, it had staying power. If something was important, it was written down, if not, it was forgotten.

**Esther** is notable in biblical history not only for **her** role in rescuing the people of ADONAI, but also for the authority **she** achieved to write (though most likely **she** used scribes to record **her** words just as Haman and **Mordecai** had done). **She** had initiated **Mordecai's** promotion and given **him** wealth, and it was **her** authority that confirmed **his** previous letter. No other woman among God's **people** wrote with authority to confirm and establish a religious practice that is still with us today. The importance of most biblical women, such as Sarah and Hannah, can be found in their motherhood. But **Esther's** importance to **the Jewish people** is not as a mother, but as a **queen**.<sup>127</sup>