

Esther 10 — Next unto the King — The Book's Last Three Verses, and the Unnamed God Who Governed Every One of Them

Esther 10: a three-verse coda to the book. Ahasuerus (Xerxes) lays a tribute on his empire; the chronicles of Media and Persia record the greatness of Mordecai the Jew, who has risen to be second only to the king and who spends that power seeking his people's welfare and speaking peace to all his seed. Persia under Ahasuerus, c. 473 BC, in the years after the deliverance of Purim.

Ten chapters ago the book opened on a drunken feast in Susa, with a king who could be flattered into signing anything and a queen deposed for refusing to be displayed. Between then and now a Jewish girl has become queen, a genocide has been decreed and then reversed, a gallows built for Mordecai has hanged Haman instead, and a persecuted minority scattered across a hundred and twenty-seven provinces has been handed the right to defend its own life. Now the noise dies down. The book that began with a six-month banquet ends with three quiet verses — a coda, an epilogue, almost a closing credit. There is no new crisis here, no reversal, no scene. There is a tax, a footnote to the royal archives, and a single sentence of portraiture that turns out to hold the whole book.

Hebrew Word Studies

gedullah (H1420) (גְּדֻלָּה) — **greatness, magnitude, the state of being made great v. 2.** The word the book chooses for Mordecai's stature is *gedullah* — not merely bigness but *conferred* greatness, greatness one has been raised into. It is the same noun used earlier in the book for the very honors Haman paraded before his friends: "Haman told them of the glory of his riches... and all the things wherein the king had promoted him" (Esther 5:11), that promotion being this same *gedullah*. The book sets the two men's greatness in deliberate rhymed contrast: Haman's *gedullah* was self-recited over dinner and collapsed on a gallows; Mordecai's *gedullah* is written into the empire's own chronicles and spent on his people. Scripture is wary of greatness that a man announces about himself and quick to honor greatness God confers and a man pours out — "he that is greatest among you shall be your servant" (Matt. 23:11). The Restoration frames the same distinction as the difference between the arm of flesh and the Lord's own exalting hand: "them who are exalted... shall be abased" who trust in themselves (D&C 101:42), while true greatness is measured by whom you lift. Mordecai's *gedullah* is the kind heaven keeps a record of, because he did not keep it for himself.

mishneh (H4932) (מִשְׁנֶה) — **second, double, the one who is next in rank v. 3.** "Next unto king Ahasuerus" translates *mishneh* — literally "second," the number-two, the one who stands next to the throne. It is precisely the word for the office of a righteous exile at a foreign court: the same station Joseph held in Egypt and Daniel in Babylon and Persia, though those texts use kindred vocabulary; here the book names it outright. *Mishneh* also carries the sense of "double," and there is a fitness in that — the second-in-command is the king's doubled reach, acting in his name. What makes the book's ending gospel rather than mere political success is *whom* the second seat served. Nearness to worldly power is morally neutral; it damns or saves depending on what you seek with it. Mordecai's proximity to Ahasuerus is the whole mechanism of Israel's deliverance, exactly as Joseph's proximity to Pharaoh preserved "much people alive" (Gen. 50:20) and Daniel's to Darius sheltered the exiles. The Doctrine and Covenants gives the disciple the same promise of a divine second-in-command going before him: "I will go before your face... and mine angels round about you, to bear you up" (D&C 84:88). Mordecai was, under God, that going-before for his people — the man in the second seat because Someone unnamed had put him there.

ratsah / ratsui (H7521) (רָצָה) — **to be pleased with, to accept favorably; here, accepted, favored v. 3.** "Accepted of the multitude of his brethren" — the word is from *ratsah*, the verb of favorable acceptance. Its home is the sacrificial altar: an offering is *ratsah*, "accepted," when God receives it with pleasure ("it shall be perfect to be accepted," Lev. 22:21). To say Mordecai was *ratsui* of his brethren is to borrow the language of an accepted offering and lay it on a man — his people received him the way heaven receives a pleasing sacrifice. And that is telling, because acceptance by "the multitude" is a rare and hard thing; leaders who wield power seldom keep the love of the led. Mordecai did, and the book tells us why in the next breath: he sought their welfare and spoke their peace, so the acceptance was earned by service, not demanded by office. The same root reaches to the great promise of divine acceptance — "let the words of my mouth... be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD" (Ps. 19:14) — and the Lord's own standard for what he will receive: "he that receiveth you as a little child receiveth my kingdom" (D&C 99:3, the pattern of receiving in favor). Mordecai, favored by his brethren for seeking their good, is a small icon of the acceptance every disciple hopes to hear pronounced at the last.

tov (H2896) (טוֹב) — **good, welfare, well-being; here rendered "wealth" v. 3.** "Seeking the *wealth* of his people" — and modern ears mishear this as money. The Hebrew is *tov*, the enormous word for "good" that opens the Bible ("God saw... that it

was good," Gen. 1). "Wealth" here is the King James translators' older English for *welfare*, well-being, the whole good of a people — their safety, their flourishing, their peace. So the verse is not praising a treasurer who enriched his tribe; it is praising a man whose aim was his people's total good. This is the verb of the shepherd and the consecrated steward: to *seek the good* of those in your care. It stands directly against Haman, who sought his people's destruction, and it names the disposition Zion is built on — every man "seeking the interest of his neighbour, and doing all things with an eye single to the glory of God" (D&C 82:19). To seek the *tov* of your people, and not your own, is the difference between a Haman and a Mordecai, between Babylon and Zion. The book's final estimate of its hero is that he sought the good of others — the plainest description of a righteous life the Old Testament can give.

shalom (H7965) (שָׁלוֹם) — peace, wholeness, completeness, welfare v. 3. The book's last word — almost literally, in the Hebrew — is *shalom*: "speaking peace to all his seed." It is the great biblical word for peace that means far more than the absence of war; it is wholeness, soundness, the whole of a life as it ought to be, knit together and unbroken. That the scroll ends on *shalom* is the whole point of its ending. A book that opened on a wine-soaked feast, ran through an edict of annihilation, and climbed over a gallows and a battlefield, comes to rest on one man speaking wholeness over the generations to come. And "to all his seed" reaches past the present crowd to the children not yet born — Mordecai's peace is generational, aimed at people he would never meet. This is the priestly blessing's final note ("the LORD... give thee peace," Num. 6:26) and the promise the risen Christ leaves his own ("Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you," John 14:27). The Restoration hears the same word as the reward of the faithful in every storm: "he who is faithful and endureth shall overcome the world... my peace I give unto you" (cf. D&C 59:23, "the reward of peace in this world"). Esther closes on a man speaking *shalom* to the unborn — and behind the man, unnamed, the God who is himself the giver of that peace.

From the Chapter's Architecture

And the coda is built as a set of rhyming contrasts with everything that came before. Ahasuerus lays a tribute; Mordecai lays up peace. Haman recited his own gedullah at dinner and lost it; Mordecai's gedullah is written in the chronicles and spent on others. The edict of chapter 3 marked "the Jew" for death; the honor roll of chapter 10 writes "the Jew" into the empire's glory. The book does not end by resolving a plot — the plot resolved a chapter ago. It ends by drawing a portrait, and every line of the portrait is the photographic negative of the villain the book began by fearing.