

Esther 9 — The Day That Was Turned — The Great Reversal, the Hand Held Back from the Spoil, and the Feast That Remembers a God Who Is Never Named

Esther 9: on the thirteenth of Adar — the very day Haman's decree appointed for the slaughter of the Jews — the day is 'turned to the contrary,' and the covenant people are delivered throughout the hundred twenty-seven provinces of Persia; Haman's ten sons fall, the enemies are defeated with a threefold refusal to touch the spoil, and Mordecai and Esther institute Purim as a perpetual feast. Persia under Ahasuerus (Xerxes I), c. 473 BC.

For eight chapters the book of Esther has been winding a spring. A drunken king deposes a queen; an orphaned Jewish girl is taken into a harem and hides her people; a proud courtier named Haman, an Agagite, is enraged by one man who will not bow, and buys from the king a decree to annihilate every Jew in the empire on a single day. He casts *Pur* — the lot — to choose that day, and the lot falls on the thirteenth of the twelfth month, Adar. Then the spring begins to release: a sleepless night, a book of records read aloud, a gallows built for Mordecai that swallows Haman instead, a second decree that cannot revoke the first but arms its victims. And now the appointed day arrives. Everything the whole book has been building toward lands in a single verse — and that verse turns on a single Hebrew word.

Hebrew Word Studies

***haphak* (H2015) (הִפָּךְ) — to turn, overturn, overthrow, reverse end for end vv. 1, 22.** This is the word the whole book stands on. *Haphak* is not gentle change; it is inversion — the verb for God overthrowing Sodom (Gen. 19:25), for the Nile "turned to blood" (Ex. 7:17), for Nineveh "overthrown" (Jonah 3:4). In Esther it frames the deliverance twice, and the two occurrences are the book's whole architecture: the day "was turned to the contrary" (v. 1), and the month "was turned unto them from sorrow to joy" (v. 22). Same verb, and between them the reversal is total — enemy to victim, gallows to gallows, mourning to feast. This is the God of the Reversal that the Old Testament sings about even when Esther will not name Him: Hannah's song, where "the bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength... he raiseth up the poor out of the dust" (1 Sam. 2:4, 8); the promise that "weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Ps. 30:5); and Mary's Magnificat, which is Hannah's song reborn — "he hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree" (Luke 1:52). Latter-day revelation makes the same overturning the shape of the whole plan: "the last shall be first, and the first shall be last" (D&C 29:30). Wherever the covenant story turns a catastrophe into a deliverance without erasing a single fact of it, this verb is the hinge. Esther 9 is *haphak* made into a holiday.

***baz* / *bizzah* (H961) (בַּז / בִּזָּה) — spoil, plunder, prey — the goods taken from a defeated enemy vv. 10, 15, 16.** Three times the narrator halts the battle to say the Jews "laid not their hand" on the *baz* — the spoil. The threefold repetition is the text shouting in a whisper. Under the ancient laws of the ban (*cherem*), spoil was the temptation that undid Israel again and again: Achan, who "saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment" and hid it, and brought defeat on all Israel (Josh. 7:21); and above all Saul, sent to devote Amalek utterly and take nothing, who "spared Agag" and kept "the best of the sheep" (1 Sam. 15:9) and lost his kingdom for it — "to obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22). Here the Agagite feud comes full circle: Mordecai the Benjamite, of Saul's own line (Esth. 2:5), faces Haman the Agagite (Esth. 9:24) — and this time the hand is held back from the spoil. The failure is reversed; the account is closed. The refusal also converts the war from greed to defense: they "stood for their lives" (v. 16), they did not enrich themselves. The Book of Mormon draws the same line between defensive war and plunder — the Nephites take up arms only "to defend themselves, and their families, and their lands, their country, and their rights, and their religion" (Alma 43:47), never for gain. Clean hands are the whole difference between deliverance and pillage, and Esther 9 makes that difference its refrain.

***nuach* / *nachah* (H5117 · H5118) (נָח / נָחָה) — to rest, to settle down, to have quiet from strife vv. 16, 17, 18, 22.** Running under the feasting is a quieter, older word: *nuach*, "to rest." The Jews "had rest from their enemies" (v. 16), "rested" on the fourteenth (v. 17) and fifteenth (v. 18), and Purim is fixed as the days "wherein the Jews rested from their enemies" (v. 22). This is a loaded word in the covenant vocabulary. It is the rest God gave Israel from all their enemies in the promised land — "the LORD had given rest unto Israel from all their enemies round about" (Josh. 23:1) — and the rest promised to David: "I will give thee rest from all thine enemies" (1 Chr. 17:10). It reaches back to the seventh day, when God *rested* (Gen. 2:2), and forward to the deepest promise of all: "Come unto me... and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). The rest of Esther 9 is a small, historical foretaste of that great rest — the strife ended, the sword sheathed, the people finally quiet and safe. Latter-day

scripture names the fullness: "the rest of the Lord" is entering into "the fulness of his glory" (D&C 84:24; cf. Alma 12:34, "enter into the rest of the Lord"). Purim's genius is that it makes rest itself the thing to celebrate — not the killing, but the quiet that came after. The feast remembers not a battle won but a peace received.

Pur / Purim (H6332) (פּוּרִים · פּוּרִים) — lot; and its plural, the name of the feast — 'lots' vv. 24, 26, 28, 31, 32. The book pauses to gloss its own foreign word: Haman "had cast *Pur*, that is, the lot" (v. 24), "wherefore they called these days *Purim* after the name of *Pur*" (v. 26). *Pur* is not native Hebrew — it is a loanword (from Akkadian *puru*, a lot or die), and the narrator translates it with the Hebrew *goral*, "lot." Casting lots runs all through the Old Testament, but its theology is fixed by one proverb: "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD" (Prov. 16:33). Haman trusted the lot as blind fate; the book's silent argument is that the fate he trusted was governed by the God he did not reckon with. So the feast is named — astonishingly — for the enemy's dice. Israel takes the instrument of intended genocide and makes it the title of a celebration, a standing witness that *Pur* fell one way and landed another. There is a Restoration resonance in this refusal to be ruled by chance: "all things must come to pass in their time" and "all these are... governed... according to the days and years" by God's own law (D&C 88:42–44), and "he comprehendeth all things, and all things are before him, and all things are round about him" (D&C 88:41). Nothing is loose in His hands — not even a rolled die. Purim is the party thrown for that truth, by people who kept the name of the dice to prove the point.

From the Chapter's Architecture

The two movements are stitched together by a single repeated verb. Haphak — "turned" — appears in verse 1 to describe the day, and again in verse 22 to describe the month "turned unto them from sorrow to joy." The first is the reversal as event; the second is the reversal as memory and feast. Between them, the chapter converts a day of dread into a day of gladness and then fixes that conversion forever in the calendar. The architecture is a hinge: history swings on verse 1, memory swings on verse 22, and the same word is the pin of both. And running quietly beneath the whole thing is the word rest — the fighting is only ever a means to the quiet that follows, and it is the rest, not the sword, that the feast finally celebrates.