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A comedy of errors, 1952.

Sermon 791

Possibility
not - from then - now
change - change - change - responsibility

A COMEDY OF ERRORS

Some Purim Reflections

March 9, 1952

There are not many Jews in Persia today - altogether about 90,000, and most of them are emigrating to Israel - and Persia today is not at all what it was in the days of Mordecai and Esther in the 5th century before the common era. At that time Persia was the greatest empire on earth. From East to West it extended some 3,000 miles and almost as much from North to South. The whole of the Near East, from India to the Danube to the Nile, owed allegiance to the King of Persia in Susa, the capital. A royal road ran from the capital to Sardis in Asia-Minor, which is said to have been some 1600 miles long, and governmental couriers, using relays of fresh horses, covered that distance in less than a week.

And into that vast and powerful empire there poured the wealth of the ancient world, and Persia dominated for more than 200 years the ancient world, and greatly affected its civilization. It succumbed finally to the military might of Alexander the Great, who, as you know, established the Greek empire. Within that vast Persian empire of the 5th century there lived many Jews. There were many Jews in Babylonia, which became part of the Persian empire, and Jews also in Palestine. Babylonia became an important center of Jewish population in the early years of the 6th century, when the expulsions of the Jews from Palestine began, culminating in the great expulsion of 586 before the common era, which year also marked the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. And many Jews were taken exile to Babylon, especially those of the upper classes.

Persia comes into purview of Jewish history when Cyrus the Great, who founded the Persian empire, defeated Babylonia in 539, and a year later he gave permission to the exiles of Babylonia, to the Jews of Babylonia, to return to Judea if they desired to rebuild their Temple and to reintegrate again their national life. That

was one of the most decisive acts in Jewish history, comparable to the Balfour Declaration and the decision of the United Nations in our day. Because of this act of his - Cyrus the Great, Cyrus the Persian - he is hailed as the second Isaiah of the Bible as the "anointed of the Lord".

Now, most of the rulers of Persia who followed Cyrus, like _____ and Darius and Xerxes and _____, were very favorable to the Jews. In a sense they were generally tolerant of all the numerous peoples and races and religions which came to make up their vast empire which the Book of Esther describes as composed of 127 provinces, from India to Ethiopia. In fact, the Jews were so appreciative of the good will of the Persian rulers that tradition has it that when the Temple was rebuilt, a picture of the city of Susa, the capital of Persia, was placed on the Eastern gate of the Temple in Jerusalem. Somewhat later, about the middle of the 5th century, when the fortunes of the restored Jewish community in Palestine declined sharply and there was even danger of the total assimilation of the Judeans, the rulers of Persia gave permission first to Ezra, who was known as the Scribe, and a considerable number of Jews from Babylonia to return to Judea to help reconstruct the religious life of the country, and to a Jew by the name of Nehemiah, who had risen high in the courts of the kings of Persia, permission was given to go to Judea as a governor of Jerusalem, and he helped to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and to strengthen the Judean community in Palestine.

Now, the story of Purim occurs within that empire, and somewhat about this time. It is difficult to fix the exact date of the events narrated in the Book of Esther, but the ^{best} scholarship of our day believes that the king who is mentioned in the Megillah, Ahasueres, was king Xerxes. The Greek historian, Herodotes, describes Xerxes as a "vain, foolish, capricious and hot-tempered king", and the Rabbis call Ahasueres "a foolish king" so that Greek and Hebrew seemed to settle upon

Xerxes as having been the ruler of Persia, a ruler whose gullibility and impetuosity was almost responsible for one of the greatest tragedies in the history of our people, averted and prevented by the courage and the leadership of Mordecai, the Jew.

Purim is a serious holiday which came to be celebrated with considerable frivolity, as you know. Purim was regarded as such a serious holiday and the events as of such importance that a whole book of the Bible was set aside to tell the story of Purim, and in the Talmud there is a whole tractate devoted to the Megillah and to the festival of Purim. The Purim realized that the incidents of Purim were in a way symptomatic of the experience of the Jewish people throughout its long history in the Diaspora. There was sober realization that what could have happened in Persia might happen anywhere in the world where Jews lived under the sword of Damocles, as it were, subject to the will, the whim of the ruler or the minister, or the passions of the mob. We have many Purims in Jewish history - 20-30 of them - the Purim of Cairo, and the Purim of Frankfort, the Purim of Nargon, and many other Purims - where Jewish communities were threatened with annihilation and miraculously saved.

And so, Purim is not an unimportant holiday at all; it is a very characteristic holiday of Jewish experience. Nevertheless, because it does celebrate the deliverance of the people from destruction, the tone of jubilation came to dominate the holiday. It is a holiday dedicated to feasting and to banqueting and to song and to dancing and to plays and to masquerades. The carnival spirit took hold of the holiday, especially in the later Middle Ages. In fact, something of this masquerading spirit is already found in the Megillah itself, in the Book of Esther. As you read the book, you feel as though you are coming into a topsy-turvy world, a world of strange, sudden and unexpected occurrences; a world of plots and counter-plots, conspiracies where the designated victim turns out to^{be} the victor, and where the hangman is hung upon his own gallows, where queens are deposed and humble maidens

suddenly become queens of a vast empire. A comedy of errors! Most of the actors in the story of Purim commit very serious blunders and errors which build up to a potential national disaster, and only the strength of character of a man who does not make mistakes at critical moments saves the day. The King himself, Ahasueres, is a blundering fool. During a series of royal feasts and drinking bouts, which lasted, according to the Megillah, 180 days, during which time the King showed off to his satraps and his nobles, and later on, to the commoners of Susan, all the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendor of his majesty - during this feast when the heart of the King was merry with wine, he summoned his queen, Queen Vashti, to appear and to show off her beauty, for she was fair to look upon. Now here is where the King made his first mistake. Being an Oriental potentate, he was convinced that his command would be completely complied with and forthwith, but Queen Vashti refused to come. The reason is not given in the Megillah as to why Queen Vashti refused to come. Perhaps she objected to being exhibited to a host of drunken tipplers, or she may have been deep in the cups herself, for she, too, was giving a drinking party for the women of the royal palace. But be that as it may, because the Queen refused to come, the King was abashed before all his courtiers and he became very angry, and these courtiers incited him still further by telling him that the defiance of the Queen would set a bad example for all the women of the 127 provinces of his empire, and might endanger the status of all husbands. Women will come to hold their husbands in contempt, and the Queen should therefore be deposed immediately. This pleased the King and he deposed the Queen, and he sent letters throughout the provinces that every man should hereafter be the boss in his own home. And what a mistake that was!

Well, when the King cooled off, he decided to find another Queen, one who presumably would be more obedient and tractable, and of all the maidens of the empire, Esther, the Jewess, was chosen as the Queen. Now, there is some masquerading even

here with Esther. Esther had not made known her people, her origin or her kindred when she was chosen Queen. She did not tell them that she was a Jewess, and commentators are very hard put to it to explain the reason for this concealment on the part of Esther, but without much success. But the mask was to be removed later on, and by the hands of Esther herself at a critical moment when she knew that by revealing her identity she might be endangering her own life, but might be saving the life of her people. Perhaps conscience atoned for the error of ambition.

And now, another mistake is committed, this time by two of the King's chamberlains, Bightan and Teresh conspire to assassinate the King, but Mordecai, sitting at the King's gate, fortuitiously, by sheer accident, overheard this plotting and warns Esther, who informs the King, and Bightan and Teresh are hung for their mistake, and this matter is recorded in the annals or in the diary which was kept for the King, and this chance overhearing of the plot was destined finally to bring Mordecai to the attention of the King. But not yet!

And now, the Megillah introduces us to the most mistaken man of all, a man full of error and of criminal, vicious blunders, Haman, whose schemes and plottings turned back upon himself in bitter and persistent sequence until he is destroyed by the hands of those who sought to destroy. ^{We} ~~They~~ are introduced to Haman, vain, self-important, over-confident, proud and vindictive. Haman feels that being the grand vizier, everybody should now prostrate himself before him. This is his first mistake. There was a man there who would not kneel and would not bow, Mordecai, a man of independent spirit. He would not play up to the overweening vanity of this man. And so Haman becomes angry, just as the King had with Vashti, and decides to do with away Mordecai even as the King had done away with Vashti, but he wasn't satisfied to lay hands upon Mordecai alone. He decided to destroy all of Mordecai's people, all the Jews in the whole kingdom of the Kingdom. That was his second mistake, a not-uncommon mistake among the anti-Semites of all ages, who

quickly pass from personal grievances to race extermination, from homicide to genocide. Hitler attempted to do the self-same thing. Hitler succeeded far more than Haman did, but came to the same end, not on the gallows, but with poison and a bullet, and ended as a burnt up heap of ashes outside of his bunker in the Chancellory in Berlin.

Haman decides to exterminate all Jews and to fix the date for their extermination he casts lots, Purim, from which the name Purim comes, and the day falls on the 13th of Adar. This casting of lots determined the fate of a whole people, adds a sort of a bizarre and micabre note to this mask, to this strange comedy-tragedy, in which the fate of a whole people is at stake.

And he proceeds to incite the King against the Jews, not against Mordecai only, but against all the Jews. And he uses arguments which all later Jew-haters came to use to arouse fear and hatred. The Jews are different, the Jews are disloyal, it would be profitable to destroy them, there would be spoils - all these themes which have become the classic themes in all the literature of anti-Semitism the world-over since that time.

The King, as we have seen, is easily persuaded, and he gives his ring to Haman and says to him, "Do with these Jews as you like", and so a people is to be massacred to satisfy the peeve and the hurt vanity of a scheming minister, and after the King gives his ring to Haman the King and Haman sit down to drink.

Is this the end of the play? Does the curtain fall upon a drama where evil is triumphant, where innocence is defeated? Does the world really belong to the crafty and vengeful Hamans, and to the gullible and stupid kings, and is the course of history really determined by the chance casting of lots? Is life but a tragic comedy of errors? Half-way down the Megillah we get the feeling that it is so, and then things change.

They change because there was one man who did not believe it, and Mordecai was his name. Mordecai knew all that happened but he did not submit. He was the type of a man who does not kneel and does not bow to men or to fate. He refused to accept the moral defeat. And while in every province, "whithersoever the King's command had come, there was great mourning among the Jews and fasting and weeping and wailing and hopelessness in sackcloth and ashes", Mordecai, who also was distressed, of course - Mordecai was not satisfied merely with sackcloth and ashes, with resignation. He was a leader. He refused to submit to what seemed to be fate, to the unchangeable decrees of the Medes and the Persians. He determined to do something about it and quickly! And he sends word to Esther, the Queen in the palace, informs her of what has taken place and of the decrees which have been issued, and how all the Jews are to be put to death on the 13th of Adar, and charges her to go to the King to intercede ~~for~~ for her people. Esther hesitates, she is afraid. She had been living under a mask in the ~~pal~~ palace. She would now have to reveal her identity, and she is about to commit another tragic error, to rationalize her cowardice. She offers excuses for not going to the King. There is a law against it, coming to the King without being first summoned, and the violators are punished death. She cannot do it!

Mordecai receives this message from Esther, but though Mordecai was a very kindly and loving man who had raised Esther, his cousin, who was an orphan, tenderly and with great love - Mordecai became suddenly very firm and very imperious and very unrelenting with Esther. The life of a whole people was at stake. Myriads of lives of men, women and children are in danger. This is no longer the time to think of one's self. This is no longer the time to hide behind masks to satisfy personal ambition. All masquerade is not at an end. "Think not that you shall escape the common fate of our people in the King's palace. You alone," he sends back word to her. "If you will remain silent at this time, you, too, and your father's

house will perish. Is it not for such a time as this that you were raised to your royal estate? Why do you think that you have become Queen? So that you yourself may be satisfied in your personal ambition? Is it not God's purpose that you were chosen, that you may at this moment become the instrument of salvation for your people? The accidents of the past become essential and vital parts of a drama of redemption."

And so, Mordecai demands of Queen Esther that she fulfill her appointed destiny, and Esther is awakened and aroused. And now things begin to fall into their proper place in this drama, all these accidents, these unrelated events begin to come into a pattern, to give evidence of purpose and design. Life is guided by moral purpose, ~~not~~ by the chance casting of lots. And Esther resolves to go to the King, law or no law, "If I am to be destroyed, that's that." Leadership in Mordecai kindles leadership in Esther, and she sets herself at the head of her people and sends word to all the people of Susan, that all the Jews should forthwith be mobilized.

And she goes to the King. She is not put to death for the transgression. The King receives her and extends his golden sceptre to her as a sign of welcome. The King asks her what she wants and she invites him to a banquet and also suggests that Haman come to the banquet and a plan begins to unfold. And after the first banquet, she arranges for a second banquet, and again requests the King to invite Haman to it. Haman feels fine. Haman feels exalted. The Queen herself had invited him twice, him among all, and the King. And on leaving the palace, puffed up with pride, he again spies this Mordecai whom he despises, who will not kneel to him, and when he comes home and tells of what has happened to his wife Zeresh, his wife advises him to set up a gallows 50 cubits high so that Mordecai could be hung upon it. And Haman decides the very next day to go to the King and request permission to hang Mordecai.

Things begin to fall into place because a great heart and mind have begun to fight back. That very night the King couldn't sleep, and so he asks his scribes to bring the annals and the diaries which were kept for the King to read of some of the things that had happened, to regale himself in his sleeplessness. And so, the scribe reads to him the story of how the two chamberlains, Bightan and Zeresh, had plotted to assassinate the King, and how a Jew by the name of Mordecai had informed Esther, and Esther had informed the King, and the King's life was saved. And so the King asks what honor and dignity had been bestowed upon his man Mordecai for having saved his life, and the scribe correctly answers that no honor and dignity had been bestowed.

Then the King, being aroused, says, "Who of my courtiers is now in the court?" And just then Haman comes into the court to speak to the King to ask him to permit him to hang Mordecai. And the King turns to Haman and says, "What should be done to the man whom the King desires to honor?" And here Haman makes his third mistake, the mistake of self-conceit. He thinks the King has him in mind. Whom else could the King have in mind? And so he suggests that the man whom the King desires to honor be arrayed in royal apparel and upon his head should be put the crown of the King or a crown royal, and he should be placed upon a horse upon which the King rides, and that one of the most noble of the King's followers lead this man upon the horseback through the streets of Susan and proclaim before him, "Thus shall be done to the man whom the King desires to honor." And the King is easily persuaded, thinks it is a good idea, and says to Haman, "Haman, you go now and take Mordecai, the Jew, who saved my life, dress him in royal apparel, put a crown upon his head, set him up upon a fine white charger, and lead him through the streets of the city and you proclaim ~~him~~ before him: 'Thus shall be done to the man whom the King desires to honor'."

A topsy-turvy world, but things begin to fall into a pattern. What humiliation for this man Hama, what a colossal defeat, what a turning of the tables! That's his first defeat. And when he hastens home after this parade, his head covered in disgrace and reports to his wife, Zeresh, what had happened, she begins to sense a new turn in events, how things begin to link up in the unfolding story, the drama, and she says to him, "If you have begun to fall, you will continue to fall."

And just then Haman is summoned to the second banquet which Esther has arranged, and here the drama reaches its climax. During the banquet the King, in love with Queen Esther, turns to her and says, "What can I do for you, Queen Esther, unto the half of my Kingdom. Ask what you want." And Esther then says, in the presence of Haman, "Give me my life and the life of my people. We have been sold and betrayed to be destroyed, to be slain, to perish." And the King cries out, "Who is he and where is he that dares to presume to do such a thing?" He had forgotten all about the fact that he had given the ring to Haman, because right after giving the ring, he sat down to drink. "Who is this man who dared to do such a thing?" And the Queen replies, "It is he, this wicked Haman." And the King in his anger, stamps out the banquet hall, and Haman throws himself upon the couch of the Queen to beg for his life, and when the King returns, he looks upon this act of Haman as an insult to the Queen and to himself, and just at that moment one of the chamberlains in the banquet hall says to the King, "Out there is a gallows which Haman had set up 50 cubits high upon which to hang Mordecai." And the King says, "Hang Haman on it." And so Haman was hanged. The evil decree is revoked, a people is saved, Jews had their darkness turned into light, their sorrow into joy. "Unto the Jews there was light and joy and happiness and honor."

And the Megillah closes by ordaining that the memory of this event shall never be forgotten by the Jews the world over, in all future generations. Now, it isn't the memory of this particular event which is important in itself because it saved the people of a vast empire. It is rather the memory of a great act of leadership

of courage, of loyalty, which turned the tables, which time and again in the history of our people turned the tables, which time and again in the history of the world converted defeat into victory.

Out of this mask of Purim, this extravaganza, if you will, there emerges a great figure - Mordecai, the Jew - who refused to believe that life is a crazy-quilt of accidents, of incidents and chance happenings, who felt that there was a God who ruled through history and working with God, one can determine the course, the true course of human events.

So Purim, a happy holiday, brings with it also a very profound and sober message, a message which all peoples, not only Jewish people, should bear in mind.



1/ Not Many. And Persia, to-day -- Mon. & Es. -- 5th C. Mar 9 1952 Sermon 991
Greatest empire - 3000 - The Whole Near East - all of it. (127)
Royal Road - Susa to Sardis in Lydia - 1600 - (Gmt. carriers)
relays of fresh horses - (covered)
into that vast - powerful - (wealth) - (Dominated 200 yrs.)
succumbed to Alexander est. H. Empire

2/ With in that Empire - which incl. many Jews.

Babyl. - important center - 586.

Persia - previous Cyrus - (539) - (Permitted) - a p. later

Habakuk 2:10 - (desires act) comparable (Babylon)

3/ Cyrus - (necessaries) - (furnish) - (tolerant) - (Picture) / (Susa)

When for turn, restored Judea desired - Ezra - (kehenah)
- governor -

4/ Story of p. 112 occurred within this Empire - (Sanctus)

Best scholarship - (1:1, 1:11) - Xerxes - Herodotus -

"vain, foolish, capricious, hot-tempered King" (C. 1:17)

Agreed - in reign - (futility, ineffectuality)

5/ p. 112 - serious holiday - (frivolous) - "If - (p. 112)"

Warrant - a whole book - tractate -

- p. 112 - as great a the day...

Sober realization. Sundry Dawood - many p. 112

6/ But, because, (delusion) - (jubilation) - (Kanyah) - (Mas) - (Carnival)

In fact - something - in 1:17 - (Toby - Tury) - (Shay, Sudda)

(unexpected) (Plots) - (Jews) - (Victims) - (Hansman) - (Comedy of Errors)

8/ - Most actors commit Errors - build up to Disorders
The King himself is a blundering fool - During a royal feast ^{evening} ^{at}
dinner, ^{the} ^{king} ^{which} ^{lasted} ¹⁰ ^{days} ^{dinner} ^{which} ^{time} ^{the} ^{king} ^{showed}
off to his ^{guests} ^{and} ^{nobles} - ^{the} ^{note} ^{his} ^{glorious} ^{kingdom} ^{and}
the splendour of his majesty - when the beauty the King was weary with
wine he summoned his Queen Vorth to show of her beauty -
for she was fair to look upon.

Here the King made his first mis take. Being an oriental
potentate - he thought that his command would be complied with forth-
with. But Vorth refused to come! The reason is not given -
Perhaps she objected to being exhibited to a host of drunken
tipplers - or she may have been deep in the arms herself
for she too, was giving a drinking party for the women in
the royal palace.

So that in a way - the King was asked in the right
by all the people - and he became very angry. His countrymen
in city him still further. They tell him that Queen Vorth
defiance sets a bad example to all the women ^{the} ¹²
freemen - and endangers the state ^{the} ^{men} ^{as} ^{husband}.
Women will come to hold their husband in contempt.
The Queen should be deposed - forth with! The king this pleased
the king, and he immediately sent letters thru the freemen that
every man should, hereafter, be the boss in his own house!
And what a mistake that was!

9/ When the king erred it - he decided to find another Queen -
an wise prominent woman obedient and fractious - and
all the wardens the Queen - Esther, the Jewess is chosen Queen.

There are ^{some} was generally seen: for Esther had not made known her
people was her husband. Commentators have ^{been} put it to explain
the reason for this concealment on the part of Esther - but with-
out much success. But the work was to be reversed - and
by Esther herself - at the critical moment - when she knew
that by revealing her identity, ~~she was~~ ^{at that dangerous moment} placing the crown
upon her people - she might save them from destruction;
Perhaps conscience atoned for the error of ambition.

9/ And now another mistake is committed - this time by 27
the King's chamberlain - Bigthan and Teresh - They conspire to
assassinate the King - But Mordechai, sitting at the King's gate,
overhears their plotting, informs Esther who tells the King. Bigthan
& Teresh are hung for their crime and the matter is recorded
in the annals or diary which was kept for the King - This change
or change of the plot was designed to bring Mordechai to the
attention of the King - but not yet!

10/ And now we are introduced to the most mistaken man, all -
full of error and criminal, vision blunders - whose schemes
and plots - turn back upon himself, in both + persistent
sequences - until he is destroyed - by the hands, those whom
he would destroy. We are introduced to Haman - vain -
self important - over confident - proud and vindictive -

He feels that, being Grand Vizier, Everybody should
prostrate himself before him - Here he made his first mistake
21x26, Adl 8221 Ad 2221 - A man of independent spirit

12) The King and Haman ^{then} sit down to drink. ~~but~~
Is the play ^{then} ended? Does the curtain fall upon a drama
of evil triumphant - of innocence defeated - Does the world
really belong to the crafty and vengeful Hamans - and the
gullible, stupid Kings - and is the course, history merely
the chance casting of lots? Is life but a trap - comedy
of Errors?

13) There was one man who did not believe it - + Mordecai
was his name. He knew all that had happened. ~~He~~ 831 1331
Why did he - But he did not submit - 2141 11 531 11
He refused to accept moral defeat. "To every promise,
whether sworn, the King commands has come - there was great
mourning among the Jews - and fasting and weeping and
prayer - and lamentation on sackcloth and ashes?"
Mordecai, too, was so distressed. But he was united
more than that! He was a leader! He refused to submit
to what seemed to be fate - the unchangeable decree
of the Jews, the Medes & the Persians. He determined to
do something about it - and quickly!
He ~~called upon~~ ^{went and} Esther - Queen in the palace - ^{where}
he about the decree - charges her to go to the King - to
intercede for her people

Esther hesitates - she is afraid - she had been
~~leading~~ living under a curse in the palace. She would

you have to reveal her identity. She offers Excuses (a)
for not going to the King - There is a law against coming
to the King without first being summoned. Violators are
punished by death.

Modcai receives this message, & then - but the
 kindly, Modcai, who ^{had but a} ~~said~~ Esther, his ^{orphaned} ~~cousin~~ - was
 firm, in firmness, unrelenting with her now. The life
 of a ~~people~~ ^{people} whole people are at stake ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~people~~
~~themselves~~, here, men, women, & children were in danger.

This is ~~not~~ ^{no longer} the time to think of one self - Marguerite
 as at an end - Think not that ~~you~~ ^{you} shall escape
 the common fate of all people in the King's palace - You
 alone. If you will remain silent at this time - you
 too and your father's house will perish - ~~It is~~ ^{It is} for such
 a time as this that you were raised to your
 royal estate - 11 - Hist. accidents of post-vital, essential parts, in
Why did you wait for a Jew to fulfill
 your appointed destiny!

14/ Esther is anointed and crossed; and, because, hands are
 she became an instrument of salvation — Things begin to fall
 into their proper place in the drama, which is not without
 purpose or plan. Moral purpose vs. Esther; lots
 Esther resolves to go to the king — law or no law —
 x330/c x330/c 9/12/1

Leadership in M. has knobbed leadership on her - she sets her - (10)
self at the head, her people - She got to the King (script)
She is not put to death for treason.

He writes him to the banquet - and also Haman! - Plan - and
to a second banquet. Haman feels hated - Jew had invited
him! him alone!

On Levany Palace after 1st banquet - (shir M) At suggestion
of his wife, Zeresh, - he has a gallows set up - 50 cubits high
- for M. - for he resolved to ask the King for permission to
hang M. - ~~that~~

15/ Things begin to fall into place - for a great heart
and mind had begun to fight back.

That night (sleep - animals - story of Balthazar
+ Zeresh ^{of M. & Zeresh} What have they met?).

~~Just then~~
Who of my countrymen is in the Court? Just
then Haman - to speak to the King about the banquet / M.

"What shall be done -

H. make another mistake - out of self conceit -
- royal apparel - horse upon which King rides - a
crown royal - let on, most noble prince, King -
array - lead him - + proclaim - thus -

1) There aint many Jews in Persia to-day - abt. 90,000 - and most of them are preparing to emigrate to Israel. And Persia to-day is not what it was in the days in the days of Kurdai and Ester - in the 5th c. b4 the Common Era.

At that time Persia was the greatest empire on earth. "Its eastern and western frontiers were nearly 3000 miles apart and its northern and southern boundaries were almost as far apart," the whole World East from India to the Danube and the Nile ^{river all together} ~~was included~~ to the thing ^{in this context at Susa} of Persia. The book of Ester does not happen to when it speaks of Ahasuerus ~~was~~ from Lucha with Ethiopia, was 127 provinces. "The Royal Road from Susa to Sardis in Lydia was 1600 miles long and good couriers, using relays of fresh horses covered the distance within 9 weeks." It was a vast, powerful empire into which the wealth of the world poured - and it dominated the ancient world ^{and imposed its civilization} for over 200 yrs - when it succumbed to the military might of Alexander the Great who established the Great Empire.

2) Within that Empire ~~which embraced the whole of the world~~ which included both Babylonia ~~Jews had been exiled~~ and Palestine there lived many Jews. Babylonia became an important center of Jews following the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the Bab. in 586 and the exile of many Jews - especially the upper classes there.

Persia comes into the picture of J. history with the conquest
of the Baby. Empire by Cyrus the Great - the founder of the Persian
Empire. It was he who ^{in 539} gave the Jews the permission
to return to Judah, and rebuild their Temple and rehabilitate
their national life. Because, that he was backed by the Jews

These days - as Dr. Philip - It was one of the desire
acts in J. history - comparable, and strikingly similar
to the Balfour Declaration and the U.N. for Israel decision

in our own day: ^{The next chapter (Is. 40-66) - and among the}
^{mess. prophets were the exact word, the J. people}
^{was their prophetic focus in their history}

3/ Cyrus and his successors - Cambyses - Darius, Xerxes,
and Artaxerxes I - were very favorable inclined to the
Jews within their sprawling empire - They were generally
tolerant to the many people whom they conquered who
were valuable in race - language - customs and religion.

Tradition has it that when the Temple was rebuilt
with the permission and assistance, the Persian King,
a picture of Susa - the capital - was placed on the Eastern
gate of the Temple - as a sign of grateful appreciation.

When the fortunes of the restored Jewish community
declined in the middle of the 5th C. - and their nat. life was
in danger, total assimilation - Ezra the scribe, obtaining
permission from Artaxerxes to go with a large number of other Babylonians
Nehemiah, who had attained to a high position in the court

the story with Xerxes (485-465). The
Greek historian Herodotus - describes him as "a vain, foolish,
capricious, hot-tempered King". Jew. tradition - with him
down as a Bo C² - something of a fool. So that both
Greek and Hebrew seem to single out Xerxes - as the
King, during whose reign the event ^{actually} occurred, whose
gullibility and impetuosity almost led to a vast national
disaster which was averted only by the courage and loyalty
of Mordecai and Esther.

WRHS



It is a serious holiday
a fiddlers word. It is serious enough to warrant
a book in the Talmud, the Bible - and a whole tractate
in the Talmud. In fact some of the Rabbis maintained that
when all the prophetic books, the Bible and the sacred writings are
forgotten - the Book of Esther will be remembered. Other Rabbis
maintained that Purim is as great ~~as~~ a day as when
the 10 were given on Sinai - It was ordered that the 10
should be read on Purim - and that women ^{too} should attend