

Esther Lesson 9

TEXT

Read Esther 9:1-10:3

PASSAGE SUMMARY

In Esther 9 and 10, the story of the exiled Jews in Persia continued to see victory over their enemies. On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the same day the enemies of the Jews hoped to prevail, another reversal occurred. The Jews gathered together to defend themselves against those who sought to harm them. They successfully defeated their enemies, killing the sons of Haman in Susa along with 500 others while further killing 75,000 people throughout the provinces of the Persian Empire. The Jews refused to take any plunder but they did establish the holiday of Purim on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month as a time of celebration for the victory over their enemies.

Queen Esther and Mordecai continued to gain authority over the empire. Esther requested that the Jews in Susa continue in their defense against their enemies for an extra day and the king agreed to her request. Esther's leadership and bravery continued to be highlighted as she continued to risk her own life on behalf of her people. Mordecai was elevated to a position of high rank in the Persian government and worked to continue to advocate for the rights of his people in the Persian Empire.

The story ended with the Jewish people celebrating their victory and the establishment of Purim as a holiday of celebration and joy. They committed themselves to the practice of reminding their children of all the events of Haman, King Xerxes, Mordecai and Esther remembering that they faced their trials and tribulations with bravery and faithfulness.

The book ends with Mordecai achieving the rank of second in command. The King honored Mordecai before all the people. He was considered popular amongst the Jews for his continued work to care for the welfare of the Jewish people.

STUDY

1. READ

- a. What reversal occurs in the life of Mordecai in Chapter 9 of the story?
- b. What elements of Holy War do you see emerging from the text?
- c. How many people were killed overall in chapter 9?
- d. What does the term Pur mean (v 24) and what is the significance of Purim? What does it celebrate?

2. MEANING

- a. Though the striking down of God's enemies seems harsh, why is it ultimately about holiness? How do we reconcile a text like Esther with Christ's call to love our enemies and pray for them?

- b. Esther appears to have a vengeful heart in the requests for violence against Haman's family and a second day of killing (even a first day of killing perhaps). How do we seek justice appropriately in light of Esther? Was her request glorifying the Lord?
- c. Does Purim honor the Lord? How would you articulate the purpose for the celebration of Purim?

3. **APPLY**

- a. What reversals, if any, have you seen the Lord bring about in your journey? How have you seen God turn to good what others intended for your harm?
- b. The struggle against enemies produced unity among God's people. How should our struggles against the flesh, the world, and the devil produce the same in us? What things prevent us from uniting in these battles?
- c. In what ways are you intentional about reminding yourself of what God has done for you in Jesus? Why do we have to be intentional about this?
- d. In what ways has our journey through the book of Esther and seeing how God uses imperfect people to accomplish his perfect plans encouraged you? How has it been helpful?
- e. What is something you have learned through your study of Esther? How will it impact how you live?

NOTES

9:5 - In context "the Jews did as they pleased" can't mean that they cast off all restraint, but that they gave full vent to their (understandable) desire to destroy their attackers, as they were allowed to do.

9:10a - The ten sons of Haman were killed, likely to prevent anyone from carrying on their father's legacy of hateful pride. This was a common practice in ancient warfare, as was their public hanging to deter other would-be plotters (see v 13)

9:10b - The Jews also did not take any plunder (see vv 15-16), even though they were allowed to (see 8:11). They only did what was necessary to defend themselves.

9:13 - Esther requests a second day of killing within the city of Susa, on Adar 14. Mordecai's initial decree legalized warfare throughout the empire only on Adar 13 (see 8:12), as that was the only day Haman's decree allowed for the Jews' enemies to gain mastery over them (see v 1, cf. 3:13). Some commentators believe this must be because there were still enemy attackers in Susa. Others disagree. The text does not say the attack on the Jews extended beyond Adar 13, as that would have been illegal, thus making it quite possible that Esther's request was overkill. Unlike with the initial request (see 8:5-6), Mordecai is not involved and there is no ethical appeal to the well-being of her kindred.

9:18-19 - The two different dates for celebrating Purim are explained. Those in Susa, who fought on the 13th and 14th days of Adar, rested and celebrated Purim on the 15th day. Those in rural parts only fought on the 13th day, so they rested and celebrated Purim on the 14th day of Adar.

9:20-22 - Mordecai wrote letters to all the Jews in Persia to keep celebrating Purim on the 14th and 15th of Adar each year. It was to celebrate the relief they got from their enemies, how sorrow and mourning were turned into gladness and holiday.

9:26 - The holiday is called Purim because of the term Pur, which refers to lots or dice cast by Haman to pick the date of Adar 13 (see 3:7).

9:29 - Queen Esther demonstrates her authority by writing a second letter about Purim, confirming what Mordecai wrote in his initial letter.

10:1 - The King imposing taxes is a reversal of their remission earlier in the book (See 2:18). The taxes were on the land and the coastlands of the sea, demonstrating how impressive his power still extended.

10:3 - Mordecai was the King's number two and under his rule the Jews experienced the opposite of what they had experienced under Haman.

COMMENTS

In the sermon we heard about the good, the bad, and the Almighty in the closing chapters of Esther, as well as the entire book. What is good in the end of this story is that the reversal hinted at for many chapters is finally realized. The Jews' enemies do not destroy them; the reverse occurs. The Jews successfully defend themselves and are relieved of their enemies. For the most part they do not go beyond self-defense, not even taking plunder from their enemies. This is all accomplished not through Israel's ordained officers like priests or prophets, but through lay leaders Esther and Mordecai using their positions in the secular world to serve God and care for his people. The feast of Purim is instituted to celebrate relief from enemies, sorrow turning to gladness, and mourning turning into holiday. Mordecai is remembered as great among the Jews for seeking their welfare and speaking peace.

But it isn't all good. The last act of King Xerxes in Esther is imposing a tax over all the land, even to the coastlands. This is a reversal of the remission of taxes in chapter 2. It may be subtle, but this hints at the reality that in this world the more things change, the more they stay the same. For now the Jews are safe in the Persian empire, but from history we know their relief is not final. The world's rulers and powers will always seek their own interests and whims in the end. The people of God may find temporary allies in the world, but these allies will inevitably prove to be unreliable in the long term.

Also troubling is Esther's seeming brutality. After the Jews successfully defend themselves on Adar 13, the day both edicts permitted fighting, Esther requests one more day for the Jews to attack their enemies, Adar 14. The Jews' enemies do not have an edict permitting their fighting on this day, which suggests the strong possibility that Esther has requested more than self-defense, but vengeance. This should warn all of us just how easy it is for power that was initially for good to go too far and possibly become corrupted.

Despite all this, the Almighty is able to use everything for his glory and our ultimate good. If we look back through the entire book we can see God's providence at work. He uses both the good and the bad. That doesn't make bad things good, but it does show that God is so good and so powerful that even the bad can't overcome his purposes. He is in control of everything, which we should be thankful for because, unlike King Xerxes, He is good and He loves us.

References

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