

# ESTHER

## 9:1-10:3

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Taught at our Sunday evening service, 27th November 2022 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

**Reading:** Hebrews 4:11-16

**Good evening. Let's pray.**

### Introduction

Tonight is our sixth and final study in the book of Esther for now. And over the last 5 weeks we've dug into this incredible and true account of how the Jews were set to be annihilated by their enemies, but through God's hand working behind the scenes, were in fact saved.

And this is so incredibly important to us - for if the Jews had been destroyed, there would have been no line through to Jesus, no Messiah, no Saviour for us. So what happened here was essential for *our* salvation too. And in case you missed it, we ended last week's study looking at some of the similarities between this story and the gospel message too (you can get the previous study in audio or notes form on our web site, [dcf.church](http://dcf.church)).

## Overview of Esther

Now, before we get stuck into the final 2 chapters this evening, let's quickly review what has happened in prior chapters of this book:

- Chapter 1 (22 verses) - The King removes Vashti as Queen
- Chapter 2 (23 verses) - Esther is made Queen, while Mordecai uncovers a plot
- Chapter 3 (15 verses) - Haman plots against the Jews
- Chapter 4 (17 verses) - Esther agrees to help the Jews
- Chapter 5 (14 verses) - Esther sets a banquet while Haman plots against Mordecai
- Chapter 6 (14 verses) - The King can't sleep and Mordecai is honoured
- Chapter 7 (10 verses) - Haman's plot is unveiled but he is killed instead
- Chapter 8 (17 verses) - Haman's plot against the Jews is reversed
- Chapter 9 (32 verses) - The Jews overcome their enemies
- Chapter 10 (3 verses) - Mordecai's position remembered

## Overview of chapter nine

Breaking chapter nine down we'll see:

- v1-12 - The Jews victory over their enemies
- v13-17 - Esther's further request
- v18-32 - Establishment of the Feast of Purim

## Overview of chapter ten

As for chapter ten, it's not really sensible to try and break that down - for it is only three verses long, in which we see...

- v1-3 - Mordecai's position remembered

## Recap of chapters seven and eight

As a quick recap, last week we studied chapters 7 & 8, and saw Israel's enemy, Haman, go from attending a banquet to being hung in just 10 verses. But God, in His providence, had been arranging the pieces for years - putting Esther in place as Queen, and Mordecai in the right place at the right time to uncover an assassination attempt on the king. And this true story is a good reminder that satan and God are not opposites with equal strength - rather satan himself is a created being, with no possibility of defeating God. That should be a comfort to *us*, and a warning to anyone who thinks satan's cause or schemes are ones worth pursuing.

However, while in this situation Haman had been defeated, the law he had instituted to annihilate the Jews was still in place – and worse still it could not be changed. But as we saw last week, the king (at Esther's plea) permitted her and Mordecai to write a new law in his name, allowing the Jews to defend themselves without consequence, and crucially to prepare themselves for the date Haman had set for their destruction.

## Chapter nine

And so we read in verse 1 of chapter 9...

### Esther 9:1

Now in the twelfth month, that is, the month of Adar, on the thirteenth day, the time came for the king's command and his decree to be executed. On the day that the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, the opposite occurred, in that the Jews themselves overpowered those who hated them.

So we're now 9 months after Haman's death, and the time has come for the law he put in place (to annihilate the Jews) to be carried out. And I want to note and apologise that previously I mistakenly said that this lines up with passover – however that takes place in the *first* month of the Jewish calendar, 1 month *after* these events.

And so here in chapter 9, we are a little less than 9 months after chapter 8, and we read the opposite occurred to that which had originally been expected when the law against them had been put in place – a foreshadowing of how the law against us should have seen us pay with our lives, yet in fact the opposite is true, for we have been saved.

And we read...

### Esther 9:2

The Jews gathered together in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm. And no one could withstand them, because fear of them fell upon all people.

So the Jews congregated in the cities throughout the kingdom, to both defend themselves and to destroy those who sought to kill them...

### Esther 9:3-4

And all the officials of the provinces, the satraps, the governors, and all those doing the king's work, helped the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them. For Mordecai was great in the king's palace, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces; for this man Mordecai became increasingly prominent.

Once again we see how important it was that Esther held her tongue at her first banquet – whether through nerves or nudge – for that led to the king's remembrance of Mordecai's help, which no doubt led to his promotion to what we would call the role of prime minister.

**Esther 9:5-6**

Thus the Jews defeated all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, with slaughter and destruction, and did what they pleased with those who hated them. And in Shushan the citadel the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men.

The Jews could have attempted this anyway, of course - but they both had the king's permission to prepare, and also carry out this defence without consequence. And we read...

**Esther 9:7-10**

Also Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vajezatha—the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews—they killed; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder.

So not only did Haman's sin affect him, but it directly affected his family. The application to our lives is clear; that is, this is yet another stark reminder from this book that your sin has consequences. Whether to you, to your family, or to your church family. Don't be an Achan and hide your sin, thinking it won't affect others - but rather deal with it decisively - whether that be your road rage, drunkenness, love of pornography, watching filthy or gratuitously violent TV shows, telling or laughing at coarse jokes, sex outside of marriage, or extra-marital affair.

Our sin affects us, and those around us, way more than we think, and none of us are as repulsed by it as much as we should be. So let us not waste this opportunity to think carefully about all that we do, that we might please God and not frustrate our own lives.

As we move on to the next verses, make a little note here that the Jews did not lay a hand on the plunder - we'll come back to that in a moment. In verse 11 we read...

**Esther 9:11-12**

On that day the number of those who were killed in Shushan the citadel was brought to the king. And the king said to Queen Esther, "The Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the citadel, and the ten sons of Haman. What have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? Now what is your petition? It shall be granted to you. Or what is your further request? It shall be done."

So, the king receives the update - and evidently has no objection to the news, as his only question is what has happened elsewhere, then he then immediately asks what Esther what she would like to do next. Another blank cheque is given to her.

**Esther 9:13-14**

Then Esther said, "If it pleases the king, let it be granted to the Jews who are in Shushan to do again tomorrow according to today's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged on the gallows." So the king commanded this to be done; the decree was issued in Shushan, and they hanged Haman's ten sons.

Esther makes two requests. The first is easy to understand - that there was unfinished business in Shushan, and she wanted to be sure all those who sought the Jews' annihilation were killed.

The second however is perhaps puzzling at first, which is that she asks for Haman's sons to be hanged - despite that they had already been killed. Why does she ask this? There's two thoughts, and I think both could be true.

The first suggestion is that Esther wanted to make a public spectacle of them - a clear statement that the king and his household will not tolerate anyone who wishes to annihilate the Jews.

The second, is that this also pointed forward to the events we saw in World War 2 where Hitler and Nazi Germany killed 6 million Jews. How these are linked, is that Jewish sages had taught that either the Jews would return to God voluntarily, or another person as severe as Haman would rise up to try and destroy them. Of course, Hitler fits that description. But more compelling, is how the dates and several details leading to the hanging of 10 men following the Nuremberg trials, seem to be hidden throughout the original Hebrew of this book. I'll happily point you in the direction of more info on that subject - but I'll hold from digging deeper today.

And in the next verses we read...

#### **Esther 9:15-16**

And the Jews who were in Shushan gathered together again on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and killed three hundred men at Shushan; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder. The remainder of the Jews in the king's provinces gathered together and protected their lives, had rest from their enemies, and killed seventy-five thousand of their enemies; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder.

Here then, we're given the detail of the total killed by the Jews - which is over 75'000 people. Of course that sounds like a lot, but there are three pieces of context we need:

First, the Jews killed those who, despite the favour shown to the Jews by the king, still wanted to annihilate millions of them. Not many would say that wasn't justifiable in the face of genocide.

Second, this was a total from across the empire which spanned 3 continents and reportedly had more than 100 different languages spoken in it.

And third, and very importantly, we should remember that Haman was an Amalekite - one of the giant tribes - and as such there were likely many other Amalekites in the kingdom, whose very purpose was to destroy Israel and prevent a Saviour being born through them.

But there's a second detail here that we should note and understand, and that is; both verses 15 & 16 end with the observation that the Jews did not lay a hand on the plunder, as was also noted at the end of verse 10. Why is that? Especially in light of what we read in chapter 8 verse 11 which says:

#### **Esther 8:11**

By these letters the king permitted the Jews who were in every city to gather together and protect their lives—to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people or province that would assault them, both little children and women, and to plunder their possessions,

Why did the Jews not take up this option permitted by the king in the letters sent by Mordecai? Why did they not plunder their possessions? Well, my conclusion is that in the months between those letters being written and this moment, Mordecai, Esther or the Jews en-masse had given some thought as to how this situation arose in the first place, which was through Saul's disobedience.

We read in 1 Samuel chapter 15:

#### **1 Samuel 15:1-3**

Samuel also said to Saul, "The LORD sent me to anoint you king over His people, over Israel. Now therefore, heed the voice of the words of the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.' "

The instructions were clear, but we read just a few verses later...

#### **1 Samuel 15:7-9**

And Saul attacked the Amalekites, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt. He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed.

When Samuel then turns up he asks: "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" And further, "Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the LORD?"

Challenged by Samuel, Saul makes the excuse that he was doing this for God, and that if there was any disobedience, it was by the people that he was leading.

#### **1 Samuel 15:20-21**

And Saul said to Samuel, "But I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal."

Samuel however, replies with this famous response:

#### **1 Samuel 15:22**

So Samuel said: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams.

The immediate impact was to Saul and his family. But the repercussions were felt dramatically here in the book of Esther as Haman, a descendant of this specific giant tribe Saul had been commanded to destroy, plotted to annihilate all Jews - and in human terms, got pretty close.

One act of disobedience by Saul had been felt most tangibly by the Jews living at this time. And I think they finally had no appetite to follow in his footsteps, but rather follow the instructions God had originally set for him, and thus, not lay a hand on the plunder.

That makes sense of this passage, but of course we can't let this be another popcorn moment – this isn't for our entertainment, but rather for our leaning. And we need to be sure that we don't act like Saul and make the excuse that the things we want for our flesh are actually ways we can please God. Let me put it in real terms:

We can't throw ourselves into compromising, unethical or immoral work, because it means we'll have more to give to the Lord! We can't date a non-Christian with the excuse it will be a witnessing opportunity. We can't in good conscience go into debt buying 30 musical instruments so we can play in the band at church. And we mustn't feed our lusts buying the 8 bedroom, two swimming pool, tennis-court-laden house under the excuse that it would be a great place to host home group.

We have to ask ourselves why are we making each decision we do, and what does God truly think of the matter? What would *He* have us do?

Simply put, you can fake a lot of things, but you can't fake obedience. And here, I believe the Jews in the kingdom had recognised that, and were acting on it.

So, on the 13th we saw 500 killed in Shushan, and then 300 more on the 14th. And now the report comes in that on the 13th 75'000 were killed throughout the rest of the kingdom.

#### **Esther 9:17-19**

This was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar. And on the fourteenth of the month they rested and made it a day of feasting and gladness. But the Jews who were at Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth day, as well as on the fourteenth; and on the fifteenth of the month they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. Therefore the Jews of the villages who dwelt in the unwall'd towns celebrated the fourteenth day of the month of Adar with gladness and feasting, as a holiday, and for sending presents to one another.

Whereas the Jews throughout the kingdom fought against their enemies on the 13th only (and rested on the 14th), in Shushan, they also fought on the 14th (and so rested on 15th). And again there was such joy and celebration at their salvation – which should be a healthy reminder to us for the same!

#### **Esther 9:20-22**

And Mordecai wrote these things and sent letters to all the Jews, near and far, who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, to establish among them that they should celebrate yearly the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar, as the days on which the Jews had rest from their enemies, as the month which was turned from sorrow to joy for them, and from mourning to a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and joy, of sending presents to one another and gifts to the poor.

No doubt Mordecai was mindful that people find it amazingly easy to forget all the good things done for them, and so institutes this annual remembrance so that they will not forget nor take for granted what happened here. In the same way, communion is there that we might not forget or take for granted all that Jesus did for us on the cross.

Here, we see that the Jews not only sent presents to each other - but gifts to the poor also. And at this time of year, especially given the cost-of-living crisis we find ourselves in, we should each be thinking through what we can do to help those who are truly struggling.

#### **Esther 9:23-25**

So the Jews accepted the custom which they had begun, as Mordecai had written to them, because Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to annihilate them, and had cast Pur (that is, the lot), to consume them and destroy them; but when Esther came before the king, he commanded by letter that this wicked plot which Haman had devised against the Jews should return on his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows.

This is a summary of the whole book! And I don't know about you, but it reminds me of what God had promised to Abram back in Genesis chapter 12:

#### **Genesis 12:3**

I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Indeed things had been turned on Haman's head!

#### **Esther 9:26-28**

So they called these days Purim, after the name Pur. Therefore, because of all the words of this letter, what they had seen concerning this matter, and what had happened to them, the Jews established and imposed it upon themselves and their descendants and all who would join them, that without fail they should celebrate these two days every year, according to the written instructions and according to the prescribed time, that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city, that these days of Purim should not fail to be observed among the Jews, and that the memory of them should not perish among their descendants.

And the Jews still celebrate the Feast of Purim today, often reading the book of Esther publicly - plus some other traditions such as sharing celebratory meals, or dressing up in costumes.

#### **Esther 9:29**

Then Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter about Purim.

So a second letter was written to firmly establish this custom, with Esther seen positively as the role model that she is - joining many other women in the Bible who should be seen as a good example, from Ruth, to Mary, to Hannah, Sarah, Lois & Eunice, the other Mary and more.



**Esther 9:30-31**

And Mordecai sent letters to all the Jews, to the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with words of peace and truth, to confirm these days of Purim at their appointed time, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had prescribed for them, and as they had decreed for themselves and their descendants concerning matters of their fasting and lamenting.

Mordecai clearly didn't want them to forget what had been done for them - how desperate a situation they had been in - and merely have a party each year. Rather, he wanted people to remember the loud and bitter cry he had when he realised the demands of the law that would have required his life.

Therein is a reminder for us, to not merely celebrate Christmas with days off, pigs in blankets or decorating a tree. Nor to celebrate Easter with merely chocolate and long weekend. No, no. Let us remember the terrifying position we were in, and how God has shown his amazing grace to us in sending His only son to this earth to die in our place that we might have eternal life.

The chapter closes:

**Esther 9:32**

So the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim, and it was written in the book.

No doubt, the records of the kingdom were those such as the king had his servants read to him back in chapter 6.

## Chapter ten

And so we enter this last and very short chapter of Esther, and read:

**Esther 10:1**

And King Ahasuerus imposed tribute on the land and on the islands of the sea.

We're not alone in taxes being imposed! But here, the king has absolute authority, and we now see the level to which he promoted Mordecai:

**Esther 10:2-3**

Now all the acts of his power and his might, and the account of the greatness of Mordecai, to which the king advanced him, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia? For Mordecai the Jew was second to King Ahasuerus, and was great among the Jews and well received by the multitude of his brethren, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his countrymen.

Mordecai is a great example. He was wise in telling Esther not to reveal her background, but wasn't impatient when he was not recognised by the king. He didn't bow down to Haman - a matter of principle knowing God had cursed the Amalekites - nor did he tremble before Haman even after the law is passed against him. He had faith that help would come, even if Esther didn't help. He doesn't get prideful when recognised, and he sought the good of his people, and spoke peace. These are good attributes.

## Summary

And as we now wrap up our study of the book of Esther, we'd do well to personally think through the various examples we've seen here - from Haman to the king, to Vashti, Esther, and Mordecai (to name the big ones) - and consider what we can learn from them.

In summary of the whole book, in it we see God's providence and the problem of self - of pride in all its ugliness. We also see the beauty of humility and selflessness. And how obedience in all things matters - not only for us, but those around us too. That needs application on our part.

And I think we should also reflect on how much benefit there is from reading the Bible, and discovering treasures such as the book of Esther. Indeed, the man who doesn't read has no advantage over the one who can't! JC Ryle put it like this:

Next to praying there is nothing so important in practical religion as Bible-reading. Happy is that man who possesses a Bible! Happier still is he who reads it! Happiest of all is he who not only reads it, but obeys it, and makes it the rule of his faith and practice!

**JC Ryle**

## Application questions

Specific to this week's study, I encourage you to ponder these questions:

- Are you taking time to think through the consequences of your actions?
- Are you willing to obey God in everything?
- Are you taking Jesus sacrifice for granted?

## Closing thought

There's one final thought I want to leave you with, and that is how terrifying it was for Esther, even as the queen, to stand before the king's throne and ask for help - but that for you, when you need help in obeying the Lord, you do not need to be terrified. Note what we read in Hebrews:

### Hebrews 4:14-16

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. **Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace**, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

**Let's pray.**