

ESTHER 8-10

Although it might seem a lot to cover three whole chapters in one study, it seems best as these chapters go together as the conclusion to the book. They are however chapters which may give us a bit of difficulty. Chapter 9 in particular makes uncomfortable reading as it is very violent. What are we to learn from these chapters?

As we approach the end of Esther we need to do so remembering a couple of things which should help us as we study chapters 8-10.

Firstly, this is real history. Esther is narrative, and God, through the human author of the book is telling us what really happened. This is a narrative of how the Jews avoided being destroyed, and fought back against a genocide attempt. As with all life in this fallen world things are messy and hard and not always as morally clear as in fiction. We must not be naive about what we are dealing with in these chapters, and we should avoid the temptation to want to tidy it up.

However, secondly, we also need to remember what we have seen about why we have the book of Esther in the Bible. It is a snapshot in history of God's working to preserve his people and to fulfil his great covenant promises to rescue and to exalt the Lord Jesus. It is an incident in the life of the Jews that can give hope for all God's people in all generations. As we come to the close of the book, what we have is a great reversal of the persecution against them by their enemies. As such it points beyond itself – to the final great reversal of the judgement. If we are too squeamish about what takes place in these chapters it may be because we don't really understand the need for sin to be destroyed, and God to be recognised as King, and his people to be delivered.

If you choose to do these 3 chapter in one study there won't be time to cover with all the details of the verses, but there are 5 themes that need to be noticed and applied.

Reversal (8:1-14)

After the excitement of the events of chapter 7 it is important to notice that the basic problem still stands. The Kings law authorising the destruction of the

Jews still stands, and it cannot be unwritten. This law came about as a result of deliberate lies told about God's people by Haman to the King (remember 3:8).

In chapter 8 we see how this is dealt with. Notice that even though Haman has gone, and the Jews seem to have the upper hand they don't take the law into their own hands. Esther weeps and pleads before the King, and what happens comes from his hand. He writes a new decree enabling the Jews to defend themselves.

It is worth comparing 3:10-14 with 8:7-14. At almost every point what we have is a reversal of the wicked law. All the details are the same (the way the law is written, the way it is told throughout the empire). Evil is overturned and replaced by what is right.

This is a picture of how wrongs will be righted at the end. Our temptation as believers who are persecuted and misrepresented is to want to defend ourselves and even try and get power to do that now, but we must be patient. There is coming a day when the King of Kings will reverse all evil with right, and show who are his.

Rejoicing (8:15-17)

Another interesting reversal in chapter 8 is the response of the people to this new law. Whereas the first decree brought great confusion to the kingdom (see the end of chapter 3), this new decree brought great rejoicing (3:16). Now obviously this was natural – the Jews were no longer fearing for their lives, but it is a picture of the joy there will be at the end when the great King speaks and acts and judges.

Restraint (9:1-17)

Chapter 9 is a hard chapter, a description of the day of violence. However it is important to notice the restraint of what goes on. This is a description of self defence, it would not have happened if were not for the original law Haman had caused the King to pass. It is also not an ethnic war – people are not killed for not being genetically Jewish, they are killed for opposing the Jews, for hating and persecuting God's people (which is hating and persecuting God

himself). Repentance and forgiveness was possible – chapter 9 tells us that many became Jews (9:17), which meant that they turned to worship the LORD.

It was also restrained in that the King had allowed them to seize the plunder of their enemies (a common practice in warfare – 8:11), but the Jews did not (9:10).

Putting this together, we see a picture of the judgement of God on the enemies of God in this chapter. It is not attractive – sin and judgement never is – but it is a solemn picture of the great judgement to come.

Remembering (9:18-32)

In 9:18-32 we read about the Jews deciding to remember all that has taken place in this book for generations to come. They call the festival Purim, a reference to the fact that Haman rolled dice “pur” to decide which day to destroy them (3:7, 9:26). It is clearly an ironic title to the festival, by calling it this they are saying that God is in charge, not luck. The festival is a way of generations to come remembering God’s commitment to rescue his people and fulfil his promises. Even in the darkest hour he did not forget or forsake them.

Recognition (10:1-3)

The book closes with Mordecai being exalted. Throughout the book he has been in the background, acting in a godly way, doing what is right but not being recognised or praised for it. Now he is made second only to the King (10:3). Again, this is a picture of the great judgement to come, where nothing done for the glory of the great King will be ignored.