

Learning to Trust God's Unseen Hand

A Study of Esther

Esther 9:1-19

Lesson #11: In times of defense, remember mercy.

Introduction: Consider the interesting wording of the last stanza of the Star-Spangled Banner:

Oh! thus be it ever, when freemen shall stand
Between their loved home and the war's desolation!
Blest with victory and peace, may the heav'n rescued land
Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation.
*Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,
And this be our motto: "In God is our trust."*
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!

A question that is raised here is this: by what do we gain or lose by invoking the name of God when it comes the fighting of a battle? Is it appropriate to invoke the name of God when going to war? While the answers to these questions are not easy, they are nonetheless worthy of inquiry. Too easily have we just associated God's covenant relationship with the Jews as having the same legitimacy for America. In addressing this issue, we find that while God's relationship with Israel is unique, there are moral focal points that we can be applied to any culture at any time, including how we are to defend ourselves from those who will attack us because of our faith.

Verses 1-10

- The author builds a chiasmic structure into his presentation of the events pictured in 9:1–19. That structure flows as follows:
 - A The timing of the victory (9:1)
 - B The extent of the victory throughout the empire (9:2–5)
 - C The victory in Susa (day 1) (9:6–10)
 - D The petition for more opportunity for victory (9:11–13)
 - C' The victory in Susa (day 2) (9:14–15)
 - B' The extent of the victory throughout the empire (9:16)
 - A' The timing of the victory (9:17–19)¹
- The Jews' enemies had hoped to destroy them and take their riches, but their plans failed. Although the situation is expressed with the passive "the tables were turned,"

¹ Barry C. Davis, "Expositions of the Book of Esther," in *Ruth & Esther: God behind the Seen*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2003), 322.

- the sense is clearly that God had caused them to turn. As McConville has noted, “In a world from which God *appears* to be absent he is nonetheless present.”²
- “The lot is cast in the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.” Proverbs 16:33
 - Mordecai being mentioned in verse 4 is a reference back to 6:13.
 - Haman’s sons were all named after demons. Some Jewish scribes listed the names in the Hebrew text with only two names per line with the margin justified and indented. The only other place this occurs is in Josh 12:9–24, which lists the Canaanite kings defeated by the Israelites in their initial conquest of the land. On the Feast of Purim, the synagogue reader reads the ten names of Haman’s sons all in one breath because they all died together.³

Verses 11-15

- The exchange between Xerxes and Esther, particularly in verse 12ff has a different “feel” to them. A cursory reading of the paragraph almost gives the reader the indication that Xerxes is using his power to deliberately support the Jews defensive campaign out of a mixture of fear and respect for Israel.
- Esther’s requests for further vengeance (v. 13), which may have been due to the great degree of anti-Semitism in that city, led to a second day of bloodshed in Susa (v. 15). Notably, the emphasis in the narrative is on killing enemies and not just on winning a victory. The two days of bloodshed have led to differences among Jews over which day to observe Purim (vv. 17–19).⁴

Verses 16-19

- Nothing is drawn to our attention in Scripture without purpose. This is the reason why a close study of the text will always yield fresh insight, however familiar we are with the passage. Why then are we twice informed that on this day of opportunity the Jews took no plunder? The Edict specifically permitted such action which would have been in keeping with common practice. The Jews, however, have a nobler precedent at the dawn of their history...a historical precedent from Genesis 14:22-23⁵
- The Jewish feast of Purim (from pur, meaning lot) is inaugurated by this event. It falls in early spring, a month before the passover, and occupies two days, which are still those fixed by Mordecai and Esther, the 14th and 15th of Adar. The day preceding the

² Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, electronic ed., vol. 10, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 358.

³ John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2012), Es 9:7.

⁴ R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version* (Orlando, FL; Lake Mary, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2005), 688.

⁵ Colin D. Jones, *Exploring Esther: Serving the Unseen God*, Exploring the Bible Commentary (Leominster, UK: Day One Publications, 2005), 111.

feast is observed as a fast day, in commemoration of Esther's fast before going in uninvited to the king.⁶ This year it will be held from sunset on March 23 to sunset of March 24. We will examine the particulars of this feast during our next study.

I. Battles are for the procurement of peace, not the pursuit of any form of wealth.

- A. Esther and the Jews were not seeking territory, riches, fame, only life.
- B. In a spiritual context, the same is true for the price Jesus paid for our sin and the life we are to live as a result. Discipleship is based on a peace because the battle is over. We have no need to fight over the things the world fights for.
- C. Luke 9:57-62, Luke 12:49-55, Luke 14:25-33.
- D. In a physical context, our battles are not for acquisition, but for position.

II. The fighting of any battle must be worth the price it will require.

- A. We must be careful to determine the subject and the strategy of any battle we think we want to engage.
- B. Esther and the Jews only did what was allowed by law, and only what was allowed by law. Why? They only sought security, not notoriety.
- C. Your testimony is at stake...will you be remembered as a troublemaker, peacemaker, gossip or godly?

III. What victories God grants should be celebrated.

- A. Anytime a conflict is settled. Celebrate.
- B. When we follow the Lord, even in settling a dispute, we must not forget to praise Him for allowing the victory and being glorified through His people.

⁶ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *Esther*, The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 158.