

Lesson 13: “For Such A Time As This” Esther 9-10

1. Read Esther 9-10. Use your outline to make notes and comments for class discussions.
2. Read Lesson 13 in your books.
3. Answer questions in Dimension 1.
4. Consider the following questions:
 - a. Review Haman’s edict (Esther 3:13), Mordecai and Esther’s edict (Esther 8:11), and what actually happened (Esther 9:6-10, 14-16). What does each passage say about plundering? Why did the Jews not plunder their enemies’ goods?
 - b. How does the storyteller seem to interpret and justify the mass killings in Chapter 9? How do you square this story of annihilating and humiliating one’s enemy with what Jesus stood for: namely, to “love your enemy”? Would it make a difference to you if it were “kill or be killed”? When, if ever, have you faced such a dilemma?
 - c. How does the storyteller seem to portray Esther and her decision to have the enemies of the Jews killed? Does the storyteller place any moral judgment on Esther’s decisions?
 - d. Review the decision that Esther had to make in 4:13-14 and how she carried out her decision. Have you ever felt you were called to do something for a particular time or reason? How was your situation like or unlike Esther’s?
 - e. What is “providence”? How does the storyteller of Esther portray it? How would you describe divine providence or divine will today?
 - f. Is violence ever justified?
 - g. Is Esther a shrewd manipulator, a faithful Jew, or both?
 - h. Write a short “belief” statement about providence. In particular, deal with the following questions: How do you answer the big WHY? questions of life? What part does God play in human decisions and tragedies?

The Point of Esther

What is the main point of Esther? What was the storyteller trying to say to his first readers? What does it mean to us today? Here's what several different scholars say about Esther:

- “The novella is designed to entertain and show how humans act under certain circumstances” (*Harper’s Bible Dictionary*; page 280).
- “The Book of Esther shows us that the Jews of the Diaspora – i.e. those Jews who did *not* return to Jerusalem following Cyrus’ decree – were still counted as God’s people and had a role to play in the future of the whole” (*Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther: The Daily Study Bible Series*, J. G. McConville; Westminster, 1985; page 152).
- “Esther is the fascinating tale that provides the ‘historical’ basis for a non-Mosaic (and probably, originally a pagan) festival.... The book has frequently been faulted for its moral tone.... Nonetheless, Esther is still a religious work. For although the Deity is not seen or even heard on its stage, God is standing in the wings, following the drama and arranging the props for a successful resolution of the play.... Providence can be relied upon to reverse the ill-fortunes that beset individuals or the nation – provided that such leaders and their followers actively do their part, acting wisely and courageously.... [Esther combines] a harem tale involving a certain Vashti, a court intrigue/deliverance tale featuring a Mordecai, a success/deliverance tale starring Esther...” (*The New Oxford Annotated Bible [New Revised Standard Version]*, edited by Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy; Oxford University Press, 1991; page 612OT).
- “[Esther is]...an account of the trials and triumphs of figures involved in intrigues in foreign courts (see Gen 39-41; Dan 1-6)...Coincidences (or possibly providence) combine with human initiative to bring about a resolution in which good triumphs over evil.... Readers experience the universe as ultimately just, a satisfaction real life rarely provides” (*Harper/Collins Study Bible*, Wayne A. Meeks, general editor; Harper/Collins Publishers, 1993; pages 736-37).
- “Esther is a book peculiar to Jewish history, which celebrates the survival of the Jewish people by means of a woman’s intercession.” This author says we must read Esther in light of the oppression of Jews in second/first century B.C. for that is when the story was likely finalized. Those under persecution are often helped by the act of mocking their oppressors (Johanna Bos, *Ruth and Esther: Woman in Alien Lands*; General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church; pages 40, 39)
- Sidnie Ann White notes that male Protestant Christian scholars downplayed Esther and made Mordecai the hero and the brains of the strategy to save the Jews; Esther just obeyed Mordecai’s directions (*Women’s Bible Commentary*, page 126).