

Esther 06-04-25A

This is the 25th of April, 2006. We continue tonight our study in the book of Esther, resuming in chapter 9. Not a lot left of this book. There's only 10 chapters, and if you've looked at chapter 10, it's one of the shortest chapters in the Bible, isn't it? Let's take a moment as we begin our study to clear our minds, prepare our hearts, recognize that as we look at the truth of God's word, this is the spiritual food that God has provided for us.

It is a ministry of his spirit. It's something that he takes seriously, and we should as well. Shall we pray? Father, thank you for giving us another day.

We realize that the time is short. The time remaining to us in our lives is precious, and the way we spend it makes all the difference for not only blessing in time, but also opportunity and blessing in eternity. We thank you for the passage that is before us.

We pray that you will give us insight and understanding, not only of what happened in these ancient days, but its meaning and applicability for us. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Okay, everybody's been busy. A week has gone by. If we just take a couple of seconds to remember the situation in the book of Esther, you've got the Persian Empire.

Ahasuerus, or Xerxes, is the king. He succeeds his father, who had a miserable time fighting the Greeks. He tries to go fight the Greeks and also gets his army kicked and handed back to him, and so he goes home, and from this point forward, his empire is going to decline over the next 100, 130 years, until the time of Alexander the Great, when the Persian Empire is going to disappear altogether, being consumed, subsumed, assumed, and just owned all over the place by Alexander.

Right? So, in the meantime, Queen Vashti has been banished to go off and raise her evil son, whom she's going to bring back to the throne some 10 or 12 years down the road. In the meantime, Esther is the queen. She is Jewish.

Haman, with his big plot to get rid of Mordecai and all of Mordecai's people, has been found out, has been caught by surprise, even though he was crafty and clever and able to work his way into the king's affections and up to the top of the heap in Persia. It seemed like he had everything going for him. He had wealth.

He had power. He had influence. He had fame.

And yet, with a couple of words from Hadassah, a little Jewish girl, he is literally hoist on his own petard. He's cranked up onto his 75 foot high cross and killed. Well, his decree, even though his power is broken, and he is out of the way and unable to do any further damage, the decree, the policy that he got passed and put into place, is still in effect and cannot be repealed.

What he has done cannot be undone. Now, we noted last time that this is sort of a reminder of the nature of Satan and his incursion into human history. Satan's power has been broken.

He was defeated by the son of another humble Jewish girl 2,000 years ago who went to the cross and unbeknownst to Satan, who thought he had succeeded in thwarting God's plan by

putting Christ on the cross, he actually sealed his own destruction and brought about his own doom because the Lord Jesus Christ conquered death, paid for sin, redeemed us, and achieved the great victory of history on that cross that was intended to be the end of all things having to do with God and His plan for us. Same thing here. This casts shadows forward and helps us understand what's going to happen some many years later.

But, that decree is still in effect. So, Esther goes to the king and says, can we have another decree? And God works it out to where the first decree is not taken away, but equal power, equal opportunity is given to the Jews. The first decree said Persians, on the 13th of the month of Adar, last month of the year, you can go around and plunder the Jews, keep some for yourself, send the rest to the king, and we'll wipe out these Jews.

The next decree says Jews, on the 13th of Adar, when people come and try to kill you and take your stuff, you can defend yourself to the full extent. You can kill those who try to kill you. You can plunder those who try to plunder you.

Now, where are we in the year when all of this took place back in chapter 8? This was just a few days after Haman's decree, wasn't it? Haman had tossed the dice. Haman had cast the lots of Purim, and the decree was 11 months out. He was in the first month, casting the lots, and the lots told him, well, you need to set this decree in the 12th month, the 13th of the month of Adar, way down the road.

So that's what he does. But no sooner does he get this decree published, and Mordecai raises a ruckus over it, and after a few days of fasting and prayer, Esther goes in to the king, and so this is just within weeks of the initial decree. We're probably still in the first or second month of the year when the events all the way up through chapter 6, 7, and 8 take place, right? Well, the other decree goes out, and Haman is hanged.

Let's say this takes place at the end of the first month, early part of the second month, at the latest. So Haman gets hoisted up 75 feet high, and he's gone. Mordecai is promoted.

He goes out in verse 15 in chapter 8, from the presence of the king, in royal apparel of blue and white, with a great crown of gold, and a garment of fine linen and purple. Do you remember the colors? Some of you who were there for our study of the tabernacle, do you remember the colors of the tabernacle and how they speak of Christ? What were those colors? There was pure white linen. There was blue and purple and scarlet.

Those same colors are associated with Mordecai here, aren't they? And gold, just as there was throughout the temple. It's very obvious that Mordecai is marked out here in identification, looking back toward the symbolism of the tabernacle and looking forward to the time of Christ. Royal apparel, blue and white, crown of gold, garment of fine linen, that's that white linen, and purple.

The city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad. The Jews had light, gladness, joy, and honor. Every province where the decree went out, there was joy and gladness, a feast and a holiday.

Many of the people of the land became Jews because fear of the Jews fell upon them. They said, well, if you can't beat them, join them. And so, well in advance of the time when these

two decrees come to fulfillment, a lot of people said, well, instead of exterminating the Jews, maybe we'll just become Jews.

And they became proselytes. They were Gentiles and Persians who started looking into the reality of the God of Israel. Now, chapter 9. This is where we pick up tonight.

Let's read a little of this. 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 that day, the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them.

The opposite occurred, in that the Jews themselves overpowered those who hated them. 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 the people.

All the officials of the provinces, satraps, governors, and 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.

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. Now, that is the summary account. That's the big picture.

When the month of Adar came around and the thirteenth day came around, those who hated the Jews were defeated, the Jews themselves prevailed. Pretty clear. Gives us the big picture, right? Now, we're going to go back and get some details, beginning in verse 6. And this is ever the biblical pattern.

Have you ever heard people claim that the book of Genesis and the creation account is a patchwork and is a conglomeration of several different stories that all got kind of glommed together in an amateurish sort of fashion? It's what they call the documentary hypothesis that there was one guy they called J, or the Jehovahist, the Yahwist. And there was another one called E, the Elohist. And then there was another one called P, the priestly redactor.

And there's another one called D, the Deuteronomist. And that by looking at any particular verse in the book of Genesis or actually throughout the Pentateuch, you can figure out, well, if he calls God Yahweh or the Lord, well, he's J. If he calls God Elohim, he's E. And so if this verse mentions God as the Lord and this one mentions God as Elohim, well, they were written by two different people. Then somebody just kind of put them in the big mix master and blended them together and poured out this mishmash that is the book of Genesis.

That's what they say. One of the ways they defend this goofy idea is by saying that, well, look at the creation account. In Genesis chapter one, it says on the sixth day, God created man.

And then in Genesis chapter two, it starts all over and says God created man again. Now, which is more detailed? You know a little bit about Genesis, don't you? You've read the first few chapters. Which account is more detailed? The account in Genesis chapter two that has

the six days of creation and on the seventh God rested or the second chapter that talks about the dust of the ground and so on? Which has more detail? It's the second chapter, right? It gives us the summary account in the first chapter and the detailed account in the second.

And this is ever the Hebrew pattern of telling a story. It'll give you a big picture summary and then it'll go back and fill in the details. That's exactly what we have here.

It's exactly what we have here. First six verses, here's your big picture. Now we're going to go back in detail.

It says in verse six, it says in Shushan the citadel, the Jews killed and destroyed 500 men. Doesn't sound like a very big number. I'm sure Shushan was a very big capital city.

Thousands upon thousands of people. But there were 500 true enemies of the Jews there. Also, and now we have this list.

Let's see if we can make anything out from this list. Parshendathah, Dalthan, Esphathah, Korathah, Adaliah, Aradathah, Parmashtah, Eresai, Aradai, and Vegezethah. Sounds like everything's been written backwards, doesn't it? These are the ten sons of Haman, the son of Hamadathah, the enemy of the Jews.

These they killed, but they did not lay a hand on the plunder. On that day, the number of those who were killed in Shushan the citadel was brought to the king, and so forth. Well, let's look at these first ten verses.

The big crisis day comes, and the Jews prevail, and it is tied back to Mordecai. Now, we say, well, that's real nice for the Jews from twenty-five odd hundred years ago, but why do I care? Well, think about this. These are the people of God.

We are the people of God, right? There were Persians who had it in for the people of God, wanted to take their stuff, wanted to do them harm. Do we ever run across people who want to deprive us, want to push us down, want to take something away from us? It may not be our lives, it may not be our material goods, it might just be our reputation, it might be our pleasure, it might be our opportunities. They find out that you're a Christian, and then they start giving you grief.

Oh, you're in for it now. We'll taunt you, we'll harass you, we'll mock you, we'll talk about you behind your back. We'll make fun.

We'll try to make you feel small and insignificant. We'll puff ourselves up. It's the same basic attitude.

It just isn't as deadly for us, at least not in this country. Other places in the world, it's just this deadly. People will actively hunt down and kill the people of God.

This is happening today in countries around the world. Just for being a Christian, somebody will persecute a family, burn them out of their house, whether they're in it or not, take all of their stuff, hound them, drive them out. So, what do we think about this? Somebody has

this attitude, what should our response be? Do we fight fire with fire? Do we say, well, look, here's one decree saying Persians go get the Jews.

There's another decree that says Jews go get the Persians. What conclusion can we draw from what we observe here? Well, I would offer you a couple. First of all, the idea that Christians and believers should be sort of monk-like, should simply fold their hands and bow their heads and kick their toe in the dirt and say, well, you know, peace and love and Jesus with the little child on His knee and we shouldn't be unkind to anyone and we should just be meek and lowly and turn the other cheek and this, that and the other.

Is that what the Jews did here? Did they turn the other cheek? The Bible talks about turning the other cheek. Jesus told a certain group of people that they should turn the other cheek and go the second mile, right? How come that doesn't happen here? Your first big conclusion for the night here is it's not always time to turn the other cheek. If you always turn the other cheek, you're just going to get a couple of rosy cheeks.

If you always go the second mile, you're going to be going mile after mile after mile after mile. We have to understand the teaching of the Word of God in its context. Who is it addressed to and what is it talking about? All the modern people, even secularists and atheists, like to talk about Jesus being the gentle Jesus and the man of love and so forth.

Well, He was a good man with a good message. He wasn't God and He wasn't Savior, but He was a nice guy and He was just trying to get people to be nice. And that's a good thing.

They don't read the chapters where Jesus is scourging the Pharisees with His tongue. They don't read the chapters where Jesus goes into the temple and creates a whip out of cords and drives people out. They don't see Jesus seated on the white horse with blood up to the horse's bridle.

There is a time to be gentle. Soft answer turneth away wrath. Love your enemies.

Do good to those who hate you. Pray for those who spitefully use you. But it's not all the time.

And that's an unbalanced view of Scripture. And there are many, many Christians who think, oh, well, you know, you should never raise your voice. You should never respond in kind.

You should never stick up for yourself. This is what I call the doormat variety Christian. I'll just stamp welcome on myself and lay down and wait for people to wipe their feet on me.

Jesus didn't do that. Paul the Apostle didn't do that. When enemies and opponents started bad-mouthing the Apostle Paul and sowing discord and dissent among the congregations that he was teaching, what did he say? He said, these people that are trying to get you to disfigure yourselves with circumcision, I wish they were disfigured.

He said, they are fools. He called them all kinds of names. He derided them.

He mocked them. And I'm not suggesting that you mock and deride people as a policy. But there's balance in the Word of God.

There is a time for everything under the sun. There is a time to cast away stones. There is a time to gather stones together.

There is a time to be meek and gentle and issue a soft answer and pray for those that spitefully use you. And there's another time when you stand up for yourself. Remember, there are two verses, just a couple of lines apart in the Bible.

One says, answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be as foolish as he is. Another one says, answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes. We are called to discernment.

These Jews could have just said, well, I'm just going to sit here in my house and wait for God to protect me, because here come the Persians with their 13th of Adar decree. Is that what they did? They picked up a sword and they went out there swinging and they came and defeated the Persians. They weren't meek and mild.

They didn't turn the other cheek. They didn't give a soft answer. They grabbed a sword and hacked people to splinters, didn't they? Chopped them into mincemeat.

So, I just give you that as an encouragement to balance. It's an easy thing to say, oh, well, always be gentle and always be mild. Or it's an easy thing to always be aggressive and obnoxious.

What's really tricky is to do what Jesus did and do what the Apostles did and do what the people of God in the Old Testament did, which is be peaceful when it is time to be peaceful and be warlike when it is time to be warlike. What did David say? The Lord is my shepherd. I lay down in green pastures beside the still waters, paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

And he also said, blessed be the Lord that teaches my hands to war and my fingers to fight. So, don't be afraid to stick up for yourself when the occasion calls for an aggressive, intelligent, knowledgeable defense. There are times when you need to be ready to give an answer to those who ask a reason for the hope that is in you.

Don't be afraid. You don't have to be a wilting violet. There's a perception today that Christians are supposed to be these sort of limp-wristed, wilting, bashful sorts.

And unfortunately for you, you have a retired marine for a pastor who doesn't really see it that way a lot of the time. And these Jews didn't see it that way either. And when they were given authorization through the grace of God to defend themselves, that's exactly what they did.

And they gave as good as they got. If it's them or us, then pick up the sword and make sure it's them. Well, that's one application from this.

What is another? Think about it. Pretend like you had to be the teacher of this Bible class tonight. You got to Esther chapter 9 and you're reading about the Jews going out there hacking all the Persians up.

And you say, okay, I've got to stand up and say something profound about that. What would you say? Think about it. What's meaningful about this? How is it that the Jews were able to defend themselves? What brought that about? I'll give you a clue.

I'll give you the key, really. Think about the time here. Remember the banquets with Esther and Haman and the king? Instigated because Mordecai raised the alarm and told Esther, you've come to the kingdom for such a time as this.

What is the gap? What is the interval between those two things? It's about 10 months, isn't it? God laid the groundwork and made the provision for the people of God to defend themselves 10 months earlier. Plenty of time for the decree to get out there. Plenty of time for people to sharpen their swords and prepare themselves, right? Haman, the instigator, was killed 10 months... He didn't even live to find out about the second decree that gave the Jews a fighting chance to defend themselves.

He didn't live that long. He was already suspended on his 75 foot high cross, right? In the meantime, these 10 months pass and now the day has come. And when the Persians go out and try to defeat the Jews, there's fear that comes into their hearts.

What does it say at the end of verse 3? All those doing the king's work helped the Jews because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them. What made that happen? Fear a lot of times is kind of an irrational thing, isn't it? You don't want to be afraid. You wish you weren't afraid, but you can't help it.

You're just afraid. Fear gets in your heart and you can't shake it. You talk to yourself.

You explain things to yourself and you're still afraid because fear is an irrational emotion, right? People of God can say, what time I am afraid I will trust in thee. Perfect love casts out fear. Fear thou not for I am with thee.

Be not dismayed. I am thy God. Right? The unbeliever has nothing.

When fear gets hold of his heart with its cold, chilly hand, what's he going to do? Where do you think this fear came from that fell upon the people in Persia? These unbelievers who were kind of sitting on the fence with regard to the Jews. Where did that fear come from? God? You don't think God struck fear into their hearts? If you look back at the account of Joshua leading the Israelites into the land of Canaan, as soon as he crosses the Jordan, it says the hearts of the people melted. God put the fear of the people of God in their hearts and they started running before the Jews ever got there.

God instilled fear. God deals in circumstances and God deals in the hearts of people. He anticipates.

He makes plan and provision for you. Your life. Your needs.

Your problems. Your adversaries. God sees it well in advance and he makes provision and he can work through circumstances and he can work through human hearts.

That's what happened here. I want to close by pointing out something I find particularly interesting here. When we get to the detailed account beginning in verse 6, it says, In Shushan the citadel, the Jews killed and destroyed 500 men also.

And then it gives us this list of Haman's 10 sons. Why do we have this list? Why doesn't it just say the 10 sons of Haman were killed? Not only that, they were killed on this first day. The 13th of Adar.

Let me show you something in the Hebrew text here. In every Hebrew manuscript of Esther, when it comes to the list of Haman's sons, the way it's written, and you can see it in this copy here, although they've doubled them up a little bit, but in every manuscript, you see this funny spacing here? See how there's a lot of white space? In every Hebrew text of Esther, when it comes to the list of Haman's 10 sons, each of them is on its own line. It'll list the first son's name.

You know, Hebrew is right to left, so the son's name is over on the right. Then there'll be a big blank space, and over on the left, it'll say, it'll have the sign of the direct object. Ve'et, which means, and the next guy.

And then the next guy is on his own line. Now, in the printed texts, they double them up for the sake of space. They show you that there's special spacing, but they put more than one on a line.

In this text, they put two on a line. But in the handwritten Hebrew texts, they're all on a single line. The other place in the Hebrew Bible where that happens is over in Joshua, which is this one here.

And this is the list of Canaanite kings that get defeated by Joshua when he and the Israelites go into the land. This is the list of Canaanite kings You know why they do that? You know why they're listed out? This is like an account book. This is like a ledger of judgment.

And it really strongly emphasizes that God knows the names of each of these enemies, and He has marked them out for defeat, and He has marked them out for destruction. There is nothing about the challenges that face us. There's nothing about the enemies that face us that God does not know.

He's got a ledger book, and the names of these enemies are listed, and they are marked out for judgment, and they are marked out for destruction. That's why these ten sons are named. There's another little interesting detail about these names that I'll give you when we come back from the break.

But if nothing else, these first six verses ought to give us confidence. Nothing happens to us that God doesn't know about. He has made provision.

He has designed these things for blessing and for victory, not to mess us up and destroy us. Well, let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to see a little bit more about the ten sons of Haman and their ultimate fate.