



## The Book of Esther

Simi Hills Sunday School • 2017

Class 5

### The Feast of Purim

*Esther 8:1 through 10:3*

- How does the Book of Esther end?
- It kind of a testament to the greatness of Mordecai
- And yet, if Mordecai was so great, why would he not be recorded in Hebrews 11?

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- The final three chapters of Esther carry three prominent themes:

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(1) The Jews of the Persian empire and their great victory over their foes

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(2) The two stars of the Book of Esther, Esther and Mordecai

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(3) The origin of the Feast of Purim, which the Jews celebrate even to this day

- Each theme is dealt with in a way which appears to be positive
- We are tempted to cheer for and with the Jews as they defeat and destroy their enemies
- We want to look up to Esther and Mordecai as heroes and models for us to imitate
- We are inclined to think of the Feast of Purim as just one more feast of the Jews like that of Passover or Pentecost
- But something is wrong with the picture of each of these themes
- At first, the Book of Esther just seems like a quirk
- But, I'm inclined to believe that the author of the Book of Esther did grasp the situation in Persia, and that his work accurately reflects the unbelief and disobedience of the Jews who remained there rather than return to Judea and Jerusalem with that small remnant of faithful Jews
- The author deliberately avoids referring to Jerusalem, to the Law, to the teaching of the prophets, to prayer, or even to God Himself.
- I believe he does so to speak loudly by his silence
- And when he speaks in apparently glowing terms of Esther and Mordecai, he does so with tongue in cheek

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- Esther 8:1-2

- 1) On that day King Ahasuerus gave to Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had told what he was to her.
- 2) And the **king took off his signet ring**, which he had taken from Haman, and **gave it to Mordecai**. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.

- One would think that the King would have learned his lesson about giving a man a big blank check by giving away his signet ring
- Or, at least wait until he gets to know Mordecai better...
- Esther appeals to the King to reverse the decree of Haman
- But, do you notice how she appeals?
- A faithful person, like Daniel, would have appealed on the basis of the Word of God
- Perhaps quoting from the Promises to Abraham

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- Genesis 12:1-3

- 1) Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.
- 2) And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.
- 3) **I will bless those who bless you**, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

- The God of Abraham will bless you, O Ahasuerus, if you bless his people
- But, no... Esther does not appeal to the Word of God, or the Promises...
- Instead she references her own beauty

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- Esther 8:5-6

- 5) And she said, "If it please the king, and if **I have found favor in his sight**, and if the thing seems right before the king, and **I am pleasing in his eyes**, let an order be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, which he wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the provinces of the king.
- 6) For **how can I bear to see the calamity** that is coming to my people? Or how can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred?"

- Don't you find me pretty?
- You wouldn't want to break my heart would you?
- Regardless... It worked
- The King agrees
- And look who writes up the new Law

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- Esther 8:9-10

- 9) The king's scribes were summoned at that time, in the third month, which is the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third day. And an edict was written, according to all that **Mordecai commanded** concerning the Jews, to the satraps and the governors and the officials of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, 127 provinces, to each province in its own script and to each people in its own language, and also to the Jews in their script and their language.
- 10) And **he wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus** and **sealed it with the king's signet ring**. Then he sent the letters by mounted couriers riding on swift horses that were used in the king's service, bred from the royal stud,

- Mordecai is the new Haman!
- Look what he says!

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- Esther 8:11

- 11) Saying that the king allowed the Jews who were in every city to gather and defend their lives, to **destroy**, to **kill**, and to **annihilate** any armed force of any people or province that might attack them, **children and women** included, and to **plunder their goods**.

- He also sends out a decree to destroy, kill, and annihilate any people, women and children included, and to plunder their goods
- The wording is exactly what Esther had been pleading for

- A reversal of Haman's Decree
- And that is what bothers me!
- I believe the author of the Book intends it to bother us
- Revenge is getting even
- The new law doesn't merely grant the Jews permission to defend themselves
- This new law gives the Jews permission to avenge themselves
- Mordecai doesn't just allow them to use self-defense
- He uses the exact same words as evil, wicked, un-Godly Haman
- Kill, Destroy, Annihilate!
- Men, Women & Children!
- Plunder them!
- And it wasn't just the armies that rose up to attack them, it extends to their families
- It feels like the Jews are allowed to kill virtually anyone they perceive to be a threat
- Why do we think it was so evil and wrong for Haman to command it, but when Mordecai says the EXACT SAME THING, we somehow give him a pass on that
- Genocide is Genocide
- Do we really believe that just because someone is trying to hurt you, that it gives you the right to hurt them?
- And the Jews still celebrate this slaughter to this day!
- That is what the Feast of Purim is: The defeat of the enemies of the Jews
- The same Jews that complain about Hitler, have no problem celebrating Mordecai

- Mordecai has risen to much power quite quickly, and is quite powerful

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- Esther 8:15-17

- 15) Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in **royal robes** of blue and white, with a great golden crown and a robe of fine linen and purple, and the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced.
- 16) The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honor.
- 17) And in every province and in every city, wherever the king's command and his edict reached, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many from the peoples of the country declared themselves Jews, for **fear of the Jews had fallen on them.**

- Mordecai seems to have scared everyone by his strong response to Haman's Decree
- Look at the results of what Mordecai commanded:

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- Esther 9:5

- 5) The Jews struck **all their enemies** with the sword, killing and destroying them, and **did as they pleased to those who hated them.**

- They did as they pleased to those who hated them!
- This is not a good example for us!
- This isn't a lovely little story that we should be teaching our kids!
- Now, I know that what you might be thinking...
- The Old Testament is full of stories where God reaps destruction on His Enemies
- Correct
- Do you see any mention of God's Judgment here?

- No! All you see is people killing people who don't like them!
- So, in the capital city of Susa alone, 500 Persians lose their lives because of the Jews
- And how does Esther respond?

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- Esther 9:11-13

- 11) That very day the number of those killed in Susa the citadel was reported to the king.
- 12) And the king said to Queen Esther, "In Susa the citadel the Jews have killed and destroyed **500 men** and also the **ten sons of Haman**. What then have they done in the rest of the king's provinces! Now what is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what further is your request? It shall be fulfilled."

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- 13) And Esther said, "If it please the king, **let the Jews who are in Susa be allowed tomorrow also to do according to this day's edict**. And let the ten sons of Haman be hanged on the gallows."

- If that many are killed in Susa, you would assume that similar numbers are recorded throughout the rest of the empire
- How do we feel about this request?
- Why? Why another day of slaughter?
- And this day the odds aren't even fair!
- On the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> month Persians were given permission to kill Jews simply for being a Jew, and subsequently, the Jews were given permission to kill them
- But, on the 14<sup>th</sup> day it is no longer legal to kill a Jew just for being a Jew!
- But, now it is legal, in Susa at least, for Jews to kill any of their enemies simply for being an enemy of a Jew

- The results of these two days is quite dramatic

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- Esther 9:16

16) Now the rest of the Jews who were in the king's provinces also gathered to defend their lives, and got relief from their enemies and killed **75,000** of those who **hated them**, but they laid no hands on the plunder.

- After these days of bloodshed are over, it's time to celebrate
- Mordecai declares these two days to be national holidays for the Jews
- Three things bother me about the Feast of Purim, as described in Chapter 9:

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1) The Feast of Purim is **NOT established by God**, but by **Men**

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- Esther 9:17-18

17) This was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and on the fourteenth day **they rested and made that a day of feasting and gladness.**

18) But the Jews who were in Susa gathered on the thirteenth day and on the fourteenth, and rested on the fifteenth day, **making that a day of feasting and gladness.**

- This isn't like the Feasts of Exodus that God commands them to observe
- This is a celebration that they institute

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2) The Jews are celebrating **THEIR** victory over their enemies, **NOT God's**

- There is no talk about God delivering them!
- No praise to God



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- Esther 9:22

22) As the days on which the Jews **got relief from their enemies**, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor.

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3) The Feast of Purim is **not like any other Feast**

- There is no talk of sacrifices or any references to God or his good deeds

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- Esther 9:22

22) As the days on which the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of **feasting** and **gladness**, days for **sending gifts of food to one another** and **gifts to the poor**.

- Purim isn't like anything else...
- It's not a religious event at all, it's more like Mardi Gras than Passover
- Consider this quote from Rabbi Telushkin, about modern day observance of Passover:

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*“Perhaps the oddest commandment in Jewish law is the one associated with Purim in which Jews are instructed to get drunk until they can no longer differentiate between “Blessed is Mordechai,” and “Cursed is Haman.”*

- Nowhere else in the Bible is Purim mentioned, and there is no mention of God, sacrifices, prayers, temple or sanctuary in connection to it

- Most strange

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- Esther 10:1-3

- 1) King Ahasuerus imposed tax on the land and on the coastlands of the sea.
- 2) And all the acts of his power and might, and the full account of the high honor 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?**
- 3) For Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Ahasuerus, and he was **great** among the Jews and **popular** with the multitude of his brothers, for he sought the **welfare** of his people and spoke **peace** to all his people.

- There is a distinct difference between being praised by Men and being praised by God
- Mordecai is clearly loved and praised by the Jews
- But, he has no recognition of God in his moment of greatness
- There is a huge difference between having your life recorded in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel and Judah, and the Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia
- No Argument: Esther and Mordecai were Brave
- No Argument: Esther and Mordecai were Heroes
- I think in the current Zionist tradition of modern day Israel, they would fit right in
- Smart, Brave, Heroic young people valiantly fighting to save their country
- I just think that also, as in current day Israel, they were not faithful people motivated by a desire to serve the Living God

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- **Conclusions**

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- Why isn't the book called the **Book of Hadassah**?
- The Book of Daniel isn't called the Book of Belteshazar
- But, from the very start, Esther (Ishtar in Persian) is Persian
- Persian on the outside, and Persian on the inside

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- Why no reference **anywhere else in the Bible**?
- Esther speaks of the deliverance of the Jews throughout the Persian Empire
- Esther speaks of the greatness of Esther and Mordecai
- Esther introduces us to a new Jewish feast, the Feast of Purim
- If all these matters are of such great importance, why is there no reference to the Book of Esther or to any of the key persons or events of this book in any other book of the Bible?

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- The things that the **Jews thought to be important**, those things predominant in the Book of Esther, are **not the things of God**
- They are not the things of eternal significance
- The Jews who stayed in Persia didn't return to Jerusalem because they had too much invested in Persia
- Persia was glorious at this time
- But, it was temporal
- The reason that the rest of Bible ignores these characters are because they are preoccupied with the wrong Kingdom
- That, I think, is the greatest lesson to us from an alternate view of this Book

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- We can find that this **present temporal kingdom has a great attraction for us**
- It sometimes seems real, while the kingdom of our Lord seems distant and far-fetched
- I don't think it's our place to leave the Book of Esther by looking down our spiritual noses at Esther and Mordecai
- Let us leave the Book of Esther asking ourselves how we are like them and asking what we should do to be the people God has called us to be

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- Let us **seek first the Kingdom of God**, and don't settle for the things of this Kingdom