

Act 4

Esther Chapters 8-10

The fourth act of a melodramatic play is usually something of an anticlimax. It draws the threads of the story together and tidies up loose ends. These chapters of Esther are like that. They show us Mordecai and Esther at the height of their power as a result of the demise of Haman and the “fear of Mordecai.”

But there are surprising outcomes, which are out of character with a “happy-ever-after” story. The Jews don’t just act in self defence, but appear to take the initiative in killing their enemies. This is consistent with much of the earlier OT history and needs to be understood in the light of the character of God.

What’s going on in this section?

- What is the significance of the 13th day of the twelfth month earlier in the story (3:7-14)? Why do you think Mordecai, now Grand Vizier, chose this day? How long after Mordecai’s proclamation did the Jews in Susa have to prepare for this day? (8:9)
- Daniel was the victim of an earlier king’s unchangeable decree (Daniel 6:6-18). What is it about the nature of kings that makes them support unalterable decrees, even when they have been deceived? Hint: how were kings viewed (Acts 13:22)?
- Perhaps you think the Jews went too far in killing their enemies (9:5, 16). But what indication is there that the Jews were not **greedy** killers and exercised restraint (8:11; 9:10,15,16)?
- Mordecai becomes second only “in rank to king Xerxes” (10:3). Can you think of two other significant OT figures who gained such an influence? What do they have in common with Mordecai?
- What would a Jew, in the second most powerful position in the then known world, be able to do for the world and for his people?

What about us here and now?

- As described in these chapters, what are the main features of the Jewish feast of Purim? How do orthodox Jews celebrate the feast today? You might find the web site on “Purim” from the *Jewish Encyclopaedia* in the introduction of these studies helpful.
- In Israel, on one edge of the Persian Empire, some discouraged Jews benefited from Mordecai’s position and Esther’s influence. Ezra 7:1 says that Artaxerxes, the king of Persia, commissioned Ezra, the priest, to reinvigorate worship at the

Jerusalem temple. It's possible, but not certain, that Artaxerxes is the son of Xerxes and Esther. If this was the case, how would his descent from a Jewish mother help explain the largess in Artaxerxes' letter (Ezra 7:11-28)?

- Why is it so important that there is a mass migration back to Israel and a functioning temple? (Hint: what would the lack of people and temple do to Jesus' story?)
- Can you see any coincidences in these chapters? Could God have saved the Jews from their enemies, even if they had not destroyed them?

So what can I do?

- You and your group may never have thought of telling your individual stories of God's grace to you without mentioning God's name. In effect, that's what the book of Esther does. No where is God's name mentioned. But his providential care is very evident. Try telling your individual stories of God's grace *without* mentioning God's name. Every time you feel compelled to mention God's name say, "It just so happened" Did you learn anything from attempting this challenge?
- Paul has some advice for Christians about taking revenge (Rom 12:17-21). What do you learn about how to live with vilification and abuse?
- Reflect on what you knew about the book of Esther before you began these studies. Can you see any change in what you know about God and how you might behave? Is 2 Tim 3:16, 17 really true?