

AUGUST 20

Esther 8-10

Whoa, this is our last day in Esther. If Daniel had been considered an historical book because of the history of the first six chapters, it would have come immediately after 2 Chronicles. The history of those chapters in Daniel would have prepared you to have a better understanding and appreciation for the events here in Esther, and you'd have a better context for Ezra and Nehemiah in general. Reading your Bible through every year eventually gives this to you, because after two or three years, you'll be surprised by what you remember from the entire Bible when you begin reading a certain book. It takes a few years for the Spirit to get your saturation level to a certain place and to set up all the connections between the different books and events. At that point, your love and appreciation for the Lord begins to go deeper too.

Also, keep in mind as you read this, that what is recorded here explains why the next king, Artaxerxes, will show such favor to the Jews, in general, and to Ezra and Nehemiah, in particular. In God's hands, disasters lead to good things.

Just for fun, notice how often it says, *Mordecai the Jew*.

Esther 8

Vs. 1-2 This sudden turn of events looks surprising here, but if you know the first six chapters of Daniel, you've seen this before and you just smile.

Vs. 3-8 A law or command of the Persians could not be revoked, even by the king who issued it. This "rule" was thrown in the face of Darius in Daniel 6, when he realized he had been tricked into putting Daniel in danger. The king's suggestion here was to write another law that would help the Jews.

Vs. 9-14 The genius in how this worked out was that the enemies of Jews had had two months to be arrogant and make their intentions known, bragging about what they were going to do to the Jews. Now the Jews knew who they were. There were still nine months before the event, so everyone had time to prepare.

Vs. 15-17 Mordecai was now greatly honored. And he was a much different man than Haman. Notice the result of this edict in comparison to the last edict that left Susa and the entire empire in confusion. Many of the non-Jews in the Persian Empire even began speaking Yiddish, acting Jewish and eating bagels.

Most nations in exile became absorbed in their surrounding culture and ceased to exist. Here and in Daniel, you can see how God saved Israel as a nation and showed them tremendous love and grace. When God makes a promise, it is as good as, as well, it's as good as God Himself.

Esther 9

Vs. 1-10 Notice that in all of this, the Jews only defended themselves against their enemies. They didn't take property or stuff.

Vs. 3-4 Apparently word about Mordecai spread throughout the entire government, and the government officials in all of the empire decided to help the Jews. How many times now has God let us know that Mordecai was becoming a great and important man? And we're not done.

Vs. 11-15 Since Susa was the political capital of the empire, it is interesting that this day of retribution was extended an extra day "on Capitol Hill," or in "Parliament," so to speak. The fact that Haman's sons were killed (v. 10), and their bodies spiked on the pole by Haman's house, made a great demonstration of power and inspired fear in anyone who dared to speak against the Jews.

Vs. 16-19 This is a summary of the entire event throughout the entire Persian Empire.

Vs. 20-32 This is the official decree to make Purim a national Jewish holiday. This holiday is never mentioned in Ezra or Nehemiah. The focus of both of those books is the reestablishment of the worship of God in Jerusalem, and that, according to the law of Moses.

Esther 10

Vs. 1-3 Note that it says that although Mordecai was second only to King Ahasuerus, his greatness was primarily among the Jews. This is actually the third time in biblical history that God put one of His people in high rank in a foreign power. Joseph had a similar position in Egypt, with the king's ring. But Daniel tops them all. While it is probable that Daniel held the Babylonian government together during Nebuchadnezzar's seven years of grazing, on the night when Babylon fell, Daniel was the only surviving ruler of the Babylonian Empire. You would think that Iran (Persia) and Iraq (Babylon) would be respectful of the blessing God brought to both empires through these men and the Jews in general.

So, what do you take away from God's message in Esther? Think about this.

Here are two things that I see.

First, God is always working for good, whether I hear His name or see His hand. While I might rejoice in the "random, chance events" that work for my good, saying they come from God, I also need to accept the same kinds of "events" when they appear to be against me. They are still from God, as we'll see in Job.

Second, disaster isn't a bad thing. Often it makes people show their true feelings and loyalties. God can work these events to "good," according to my expectations, in a flash. If He chooses not to work them for good according to my expectations (note the words of S, M, & A in Daniel 3), I still serve Him and trust Him. His goodness and purpose do not need to meet any of my human expectations. He is always God, and is always good. Though it sure is nice when the story turns out this cool. (If you liked this, you'll love Daniel.)

1 Corinthians 12:27-13:13

1 Corinthians 12:27-31

V. 27 It is good to be reminded that the church belongs to God, not us.

V. 28 I'm sure these words rang loud in the division in Corinth: *God has appointed*. God does this, not us.

V. 31 There was a great desire for gifts in Corinth. We'll see this in chapter 14.

1 Corinthians 13

It is interesting that this chapter is really corrective to an ongoing conflict. No wonder it is used at so many weddings. ☺

Vs. 1-3 These verses are hyperbole and exaggeration. People who build a doctrine from v. 1, that the gift of tongues is "angelic language," go too far. Every place in the NT where tongues are used, including chapter 14, they are a known human language, though, unknown to the speaker. Even if this wasn't exaggeration, it still wouldn't mean that the gift of tongues was angelic; since in Acts 2, tongues were in understandable human languages.

In the same tone of exaggeration, Paul refers to the other gifts. Who has prophetic powers and understands all mysteries and all knowledge and has all faith so as to move mountains? No one, except Jesus, has had all of these. Paul is exaggerating.

Vs. 4-7 The ESV follows the RSV in *irritable and resentful*. The newer One Year Bible has a note for the literal translation. Apparently *resentful* is the emotional result of counting up

wrongdoing. In a way it's helpful to know what happens if you keep count. Stored up resentments are the hardest things to work through with couples who have been married a long time.

Vs. 8-10 I'm just saying this so you know what's happening, but Paul is preparing his argument against the misuse of "tongues" in chapter 14. Notice that the gifts of prophecy and knowledge are linked with *pass away*, and then these two gifts are repeated in the next sentence. The gift of tongues, on the other hand, is said to cease, and then it is not repeated again in the chapter. Chapter 14 will make this clearer.

V. 11 This is an interesting progression the way Paul states it: Speaking, thinking, reasoning. Just trivia.

V. 12 This is a great verse.

V. 13 This is a great verse for weddings, and church.

Now, having warmed our hearts with love and having read the wonderful analogy of gifts and the body and the church, you have to wonder why we need the gifts. What's the body supposed to do? What is the function of the church? Once you understand what the church is supposed to do and how it is supposed to do it, you can make sense of the gifts. If you get the function of the church wrong, or if you don't understand how the church is supposed to do what it's supposed to do, the gifts will be defined into meaninglessness and theoretical importance. In other words, if we don't know what we're doing here on earth, we won't really need the gifts and they won't really matter to us whether we use them or not. The church is meant to be working in the harvest. If the church does anything else or if any other function becomes its focus, like music and worship, then the gifts and the functioning of the members together lose their meaning.

Psalm 37:1-11

This psalm is similar to Psalm 119 in that each stanza begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In Psalm 119 it's the same pattern, except that all the sentences within the stanza begin with that same letter.

The more I read these psalms, the more impressed I am with how well Jesus and Paul knew them. As I'm reading over this portion for today, I'm constantly being jogged to think of something Paul said in Romans or something Jesus said. In fact, Jesus' teaching to His disciples sounds like so much of this.

Vs. 1-2 Not that any of us fret over these things, but we do. And frankly, when we do, they don't fade fast enough. I guess David and the Spirit are telling us to be patient and wait on the Lord.

Vs. 3-4 Notice the contrast here to the past two verses. It is almost as if to say, "Don't think about them. *Trust in the Lord.*" But it goes beyond trusting the Lord. We are to delight in the Lord. Only in delighting in the Lord can the Lord nurture our hearts so that our desires revolve around Him. He gives us our desires, in that He teaches us to desire what is really satisfying.

Vs. 3-5 are good verses to memorize.

Vs. 5-6 Committing our way to the Lord is the next command. We don't need to defend our honor. The Lord will do that.

Vs. 7-9 Waiting on the Lord is a command too, and this one is tough. It says twice that we are to wait. Notice too that it mentions twice that we shouldn't fret or let our minds be consumed by these people. If you are interested, read Romans 12 and notice that there are three references in that chapter to not retaliating against abuse. I think Paul knew this psalm.

Vs. 10-11 This is what God promises if we set our hearts on Him and wait. I think Jesus might have known this psalm too.

When you see what God did in Esther, how would you put the message of this psalm together with what you read in Esther?

Proverbs 21:23-24

V. 23 Amen!

V. 24 This scoffing is at wisdom apparently. And his mouth probably got him in a lot of trouble, too.