

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
SINGAPORE**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 9

THE BOOK OF ESTHER

CHAPTER 9-10

INTRODUCTION

These two chapters duly conclude a time in the history of the Jewish people when they were threatened with destruction and extermination. It is permanently recorded here how the Jews reached the height of their power in their struggle against their enemies. They had gone from fasting and fighting to feasting; their initial sorrow had turned to gladness, then to joy and celebration. The Jews were the chosen people of God. Anyone who opposes the people of God is an opponent of God Himself. And in God's eternal purpose, no individual or nation can be victorious; all will be totally defeated. We, who are the blood-bought children of God, are much comforted by this wonderful truth, as it is written, if God be for us who can be against us (Romans 8:31)?¹

¹ Romans 8:31 What shall we then say to these things? If **God be for us**, who *can be against us*?

The account relates the origin of the Feast of Purim, which is still kept by the Jews today. This evidences that the Esther account is a historical fact. The Jews would not celebrate the feast if it were a fictitious folklore. When and how the Jews celebrate this festival is described here. This account in the book of Esther foreshadows the final event which will take place at the end of the age, when God, who is unseen and unrecognized by the world that is anti-God, will defeat the enemies and usher in a new era of peace, prosperity and joy for His children in His kingdom which will last forever.

OUTLINE

The following divisions of the two chapters enable us to get a better grasp of the account:

1. Self-defence (vv. 9:1-11);
2. Self-defence in Shushan (vv. 9:12-19);
3. The Origin of the Feast of Purim (vv. 9:20-32);
4. Peace and prosperity (vv. 10:1-3).

COMMENTARY

Self-defence — 9:1-11

The opening verse (9:1) is significant. The 13th day of the month of Adar finally came. The king's first decree permitted the enemies of the Jews to carry out its order to kill all

the Jews and confiscate their property. The phrase, *hoped to have power over them* (Hebrew: *sabar*), conveys the idea of waiting expectantly to have something in one's possession. In this case, the enemies of the Jews were waiting for this day to exercise the power (or rule, dominion) to kill the Jews and to take their homes, land and possessions thus enriching themselves. But the verse also states that the tables were turned in favour of the Jews against those who hated them. The situation had changed. The Jews themselves had come to power. Mordecai, the Jew, was now the ruling Prime Minister, whereas Haman, the chief enemy of the Jews, was dead. Mordecai's second decree carried more weight than that of Haman's. The Jews now held the power and death over those who would seek to harm or hurt them.

The Jews in all the 127 provinces of the empire grouped themselves together to defend their lives against those who would seek their destruction. The divine writer commented that the fear of the Jews was upon all the people. Had it not been for this psychological fear that fell upon them, the enemies of the Jews would have been much more. In addition to this fear that fell upon the people, the governors of the provinces, their deputies and military leaders rendered help to the Jewish populace because they feared Mordecai, who was the Prime Minister, and whose reputation had grown from strength to strength throughout the empire. In spite of

these things, there were those who hated the Jews and resorted to kill them. The Jews, who had been preparing for several months, confronted these enemies and killed them instead.

In the capital Shushan, the Jews slew five hundred men, among them were Haman's ten sons. An interesting and important feature was that the Jews only killed those who attacked them and refrained from taking the spoil of their victims (9:10). This showed that the Jews were not interested in enriching themselves. Their prime purpose was to protect themselves. In other words, they killed in self-defence. It was not a case of indiscriminate killing on the part of the Jews. The charge against the Jews for being guilty of insensitive and callous killing is groundless and untenable. The king was duly informed of the number of those who hated the Jews and who sought to kill them.

Self-defense in Shushan — 9:12-19

The king informed Esther that the Jews had killed five hundred men in Shushan including the ten sons of Haman. The king asked Esther whether there was anything more that she would desire, and it would be granted. Esther then requested in her usual behaviour of propriety and politeness that Haman's ten sons be hung on the gallows. The king ordered that Esther's request be carried out. Some have criticized Esther for being blood-thirsty and unbecoming of The First Lady of the empire. Again, this is a negative

criticism of Esther because one can think of some good and valid reasons for her request. Haman once exercised great power when he was Prime Minister. Esther's good intention was to send a signal to the people in Shushan that killing of the Jews merely because they were Jews would not be tolerated. These enemies of the Jews would be severely dealt with. Hence, the hanging of Haman's ten sons was to stop or discourage indiscriminate killing of the Jews.

In spite of this public exposure, there were still 300 men who desired to kill and rob the Jews. There might have been more trouble if Haman's ten sons had not been hung as a deterrent to prevent further indiscriminate killing of the Jews. Peace in the capital and other parts of the empire should be maintained. Another reason for Esther's request is that she was carrying out God's purpose that the Amalekites should be totally wiped out. Whatever the reason one might suggest, one thing is clear that two days of fighting in Shushan brought a three-fold benefit to the empire. The fighting in the capital stopped on the third day (16th day of the month of Adar), and the people had peace. A second result was that there was a day of feasting; and thirdly, there was general gladness and joy.

The Origin of the Feast of Purim

— 9:20-32

The Jews in the provinces rejoiced and made the 14th day of Adar as a day of feasting and

gladness. They celebrated by exchanging gifts with one another. Mordecai then instituted the Feast of Purim to be celebrated by all the Jews throughout the empire on the 14th and 15th day of the month of Adar. The text explains how the name Purim was used. Haman had cast lot or *Pur* (lot) to choose the day to destroy all the Jews. The word *Pur* is singular and the plural form is *Purim*.

Having established the two days in which they were to commemorate this victory of the Jews against their enemies, these two days were then officially declared as the Feast of Purim. It was intended for all the Jews that *these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province and every city every year and forever* (9:28). Mordecai endorsed it and sent to all the provinces in the empire. This official document which was sent to all the provinces was also called the decree of Esther.

This Feast of Purim celebrates the victory of the Jews against their enemies. This foreshadows a greater struggle that is in the future as predicted by the Word of God. The Jews or Israelites, the chosen people of God, would face a holocaust which is far more intense than that inflicted by Hitler in World War II when more than 6 million Jews were killed. That holocaust will take place prior to the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ their Messiah. It was predicted by Zechariah the Prophet (Zechariah

14:1-11): *Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: But it shall be one day which shall be known to the LORD, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light. And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be. And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one. All the land shall*

be turned as a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem: and it shall be lifted up, and inhabited in her place, from Benjamin's gate unto the place of the first gate, unto the corner gate, and from the tower of Hananeel unto the king's winepresses. And men shall dwell in it, and there shall be no more utter destruction; but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited (also read Zechariah chapter 12).

Before the return of the Messiah, who is the Lord Jesus Christ, the persecution and destruction of the Jews will happen as predicted. Even at this moment, the storm is gathering towards this end. There is looming in the political horizon a call for the extermination of the Jews from the map of the world. Truly Jerusalem is a cup of trembling and a burden to the nations of the world. The Jews will suffer and in those days Christians, who are the engrafted spiritual children of Abraham, will also suffer. But they will look up when the Lord Jesus Christ shall return to Earth in glory with all His saints and angelic beings and destroy all His enemies and establish His kingdom of peace, justice and prosperity. It will usher in the one thousand year reign of the Lord Jesus Christ on Earth as prophesied in Revelation 20.

Peace and prosperity — 10:1-3

The empire enjoyed peace and prosperity. King Ahasuerus imposed a tribute or tax on the land and on the islands in his empire. It indicates that King Ahasuerus now assumed responsibility as king of his

empire. In the beginning of the book, Ahasuerus is pictured as one who spent his wealth on feasting and drinking. But now he took an interest in the administration of his empire. He was exercising his royal authority and unlike in the past, he shirked from this duty and let others make the decision on his behalf. The emphasis now is on *his power and might* rather than on his wealth (10:2a). This change in him could be attributed to Mordecai, his Prime Minister, his second-in-command.

Life was also different for Mordecai. What had become of him today was a far cry from his position in the beginning of the book. Then he was only an ordinary Jew serving as a small official in the king's gate. Because of his conviction as a Jew, he refused to bow down to Haman, the Amalekite who was an arch-enemy of the Jews, the LORD delivered Israel and promoted His children in the process. By the providence of God, he and his people were saved and now he was promoted to the position of Prime Minister in the empire. His fame grew stronger and stronger in the empire. He was highly esteemed by the people because he served the country well.

For the Jews, life in the empire at this time was different. Their lives had turned from mourning to singing, from sorrow to joy and from being condemned to being elevated. The Jews had friends in the government in the persons of Mordecai and Esther the queen. Mordecai was fully

committed to the welfare and peace of his people. The word for peace is *shalom*. It is a very rich word, which refers to physical, emotional, social and spiritual well-being. It describes that life was positively good and not just without conflict.

PRACTICAL VALUE

There are some precious lessons we can learn from these concluding chapters. The tables against the Jews were turned around (9:1). Having been acquainted with the events that led to this new state of affairs, it was nothing short of a miracle. The Jews were under threat of extermination and the law in Persia at that time could never be revoked. Yet a second decree was enacted not to cancel the first decree but to allow the Jews to defend themselves against their enemies. The cooperation of those in authority helped the Jews to gain the victory. The victory of the Jews was the work of God.

As Christians, we learn that God is faithful to His promises to protect and provide for His people. As the Apostle Paul has noted (Romans 8:32): *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* And if God is for us, who can be against us? The answer is "No one". Nothing evil or bad can happen to the child of God unless God gives the green light. All praise and glory go to Him! We should respond appropriately by loving and obeying Him, and doing

His will. If we love Him then we must love His people, and serve Him by being an instrument to build one another up in our walk with God.

The Jews even today commemorate the Feast of Purim. And why should they not? By celebrating the Feast of Purim, they teach their children the history of their people to be courageous and tenacious in the face of great adversities. They raise their children up to be resilient and strong. The Feast of Purim must be a fact of history in order to realize these goals. If it is only a legend or folklore, it will have no effect or impact on the people. In Christendom, there are two commemorative events that Christians ought to keep. They are Christmas and Good Friday. The former testifies to the first coming of Jesus Christ, who lived on earth and who was born of a Virgin. The other is Good Friday, when Christians all over the world commemorate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. All these events, which happened hundreds of years before, are historically true. We need to celebrate them in the right spirit and not in the way the world celebrates them in immoral activities. Yet there is one other commemorative event worth noting, and that is the Lord's Supper. Each week or each month, Christians celebrate this sacrament to remember the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, testifying to the living Saviour whom they worship and looking earnestly forward to His return.

The underlying theme of the Book of Esther is the existence of an Almighty living and true God who is in control of the affairs of men, and who will providentially provide for and protect His people against their enemies. Although God is not seen as He is not even mentioned in the book, He is undeniably present. His presence and His power will be seen in His providential work in and through His people. These things are spiritual and they can only be spiritually discerned. Every born-again Christian in whom dwells the Holy Spirit can discern these things and praise and glorify God. Sadly, the unbeliever cannot discern such things for spiritual things are spiritually discerned. God is sovereign and He is in absolute control for all eternity. So let us be strong and courageous, and do the will of God according to His Word, not turning to the right nor the left of His Word. AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Esther 9:1-11; 1 Peter 5:5-9.

TUESDAY: Esther 9:1-19; Genesis 14:22-23.

WEDNESDAY: Esther 9:1-32; Isaiah 61:1-3.

THURSDAY: Esther 9:1-10:3; 2 Peter 1:12-14.

FRIDAY: Esther 9:1-10:3; 1Thessalonians 1:9-10; Psalm 46:1-11.

Discussion Questions

1. Are Christians supposed to be pacifists? Can Christians justify taking a life? Is abortion always wrong? Can a Christian work as a hangman for the government?

2. Was it justified to hang the ten sons of Haman after they died? Would it have been better to hang them before or after they die?

3. Did the Jews kill indiscriminately? Is it right for Christians to carry arms?

4. Mordecai became greater and greater in the Persian empire. Was it biblical for him to help a heathen nation like the Persian Empire? Should a Christian become a leader in his own country and serve the people?

5. Was Esther being vindictive and vengeful by requesting that Mordecai's decree be extended by one more day?

6. Was it unchristian on the part of the Jews to kill so many of their enemies? Should the principle of turning the other cheek be applied here?

7. Why did the Jews not plunder the spoils of their enemies (vv. 10, 15, 16) when they were allowed to by the decree?

8. On the 14th day of the month of Adar, how many enemies of the Jews were killed? What does this indicate?

9. What was the purpose of the Feast of Purim?

10. How did the Jews celebrate the Feast of Purim? Should a Christian Jew keep the Feast of Purim today?

11. What happened to Esther and Mordecai at the end of the historical record? What does it teach us?

12. Why is the keeping of the Feast of Purim so crucial in the lives of the Jews in every generation?

13. Do Christians have to insist that they are right all the time? Are there instances where Christians should not insist on being right and when they should? Is being right all the time more important to the Christian than grace, mercy and love?

14. What enemies do Christians have today? Where are they found? How should we deal with them?

15. What Christian celebrations do Christians observe today? What is the importance of celebrating these events? Is it sinful if a Christian does not attend Christmas or Easter service organized by the church? Is there a difference between attending Church on the Lord's Day and Christmas? Should keeping the Lord's Day holy include attending an evening service?

16. What lessons or truths from Esther have had the biggest impact on you personally? Why?
