

## Small Group Materials, Esther 9-10

### Pray for your time together in God's Word!

*Leader's Note: Today we finish Esther! While going through these two chapters, pay attention to the idea that there is moral ambiguity (a second day of retribution, the impaling of Haman's ten sons) in Esther's character, and how it's important that God uses imperfect people as part of His plan.*

*Leader's Note: Ask someone from your group to summarize what's happened so far in Esther in 60 seconds.*

### Part 1: The Happy Yet Violent Ending

**Read: Esther 9:1-18 (NIV)** Option: Give group 3 minutes to look at the passage by themselves.

<sup>1</sup> On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, the edict commanded by the king was to be carried out. On this day the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, but now the tables were turned and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them. <sup>2</sup> The Jews assembled in their cities in all the provinces of King Xerxes to attack those determined to destroy them. No one could stand against them, because the people of all the other nationalities were afraid of them. <sup>3</sup> And all the nobles of the provinces, the satraps, the governors and the king's administrators helped the Jews, because fear of Mordecai had seized them. <sup>4</sup> Mordecai was prominent in the palace; his reputation spread throughout the provinces, and he became more and more powerful.

<sup>5</sup> The Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and they did what they pleased to those who hated them. <sup>6</sup> In the citadel of Susa, the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men. <sup>7</sup> They also killed Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, <sup>8</sup> Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, <sup>9</sup> Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai and Vaizatha, <sup>10</sup> the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. But they did not lay their hands on the plunder.

<sup>11</sup> The number of those killed in the citadel of Susa was reported to the king that same day. <sup>12</sup> The king said to Queen Esther, "The Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men and the ten sons of Haman in the citadel of Susa. What have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? Now what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? It will also be granted."

<sup>13</sup> "If it pleases the king," Esther answered, "give the Jews in Susa permission to carry out this day's edict tomorrow also, and let Haman's ten sons be impaled on poles."

<sup>14</sup> So the king commanded that this be done. An edict was issued in Susa, and they impaled the ten sons of Haman. <sup>15</sup> The Jews in Susa came together on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar, and they put to death in Susa three hundred men, but they did not lay their hands on the plunder.

<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, the remainder of the Jews who were in the king's provinces also assembled to protect themselves and get relief from their enemies. They killed seventy-five thousand of them but did not lay their hands on the plunder. <sup>17</sup> This happened on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and on the fourteenth they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy.

<sup>18</sup> The Jews in Susa, however, had assembled on the thirteenth and fourteenth, and then on the fifteenth they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy.

**Ask the Group:** The author mentions three separate times that the Jews did not lay their hands on their enemies' plunder. Why might the Jews have left the plunder despite the king's permission to take it (9:10, 15-16)?

*Possible Answer: This is similar to when the Israelites began invading the promised land in the book of Joshua, and they were not to keep any of the plunder for themselves (see Joshua 6-7).*

**Ask the Group:** On the first day of vengeance 500 men were killed and on the second day 300 more. Do you think Esther was right or wrong in her insistence of a 2-day vengeance? Why?

*Possible Answer: The text does not say whether or not Esther's actions were right or wrong. This was certainly not the most merciful path she could have chosen, and by our modern sensibilities, it seems wrong.*

**Ask the Group:** How do you view people in your life who have done something that seems obviously wrong or sinful?

- **Ask the Group:** How does the gospel change your view of these people?

*Possible Answer: The gospel encourages mercy, not retribution, for two reasons.*

*#1 - Jesus paid the penalty for all sins - no further punishment is needed for us to get right with God. #2 - It is God's place to sit as judge over others, not ours.*

*("Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord" - Romans 12:19). Of course, sin has real consequences that must be dealt with - but it is not our responsibility to seek revenge for past wrongs caused by others.*

**Ask the Group:** The Jews did not commemorate the battle; they celebrated their rest from their enemies. Can you think of a few reasons why this mentality might be healthy?

Part 2: What is "Purim" anyway?

**Read: Esther 9:19-10:3**

<sup>19</sup> That is why rural Jews—those living in villages—observe the fourteenth of the month of Adar as a day of joy and feasting, a day for giving presents to each other.

*Purim Established*

<sup>20</sup> Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Xerxes, near and far, <sup>21</sup> to have them celebrate annually the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar <sup>22</sup> as the time when the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month when their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration. He wrote them to observe the days as days of feasting and joy and giving presents of food to one another and gifts to the poor.

<sup>23</sup> So the Jews agreed to continue the celebration they had begun, doing what Mordecai had written to them. <sup>24</sup> For Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them and had cast the *pur* (that is, the lot) for their ruin and destruction. <sup>25</sup> But when the plot came to the king's attention, he issued written orders that the evil scheme Haman had devised against the Jews should come back onto his own head, and that he and his sons should be impaled on poles. <sup>26</sup> (Therefore these days were called Purim, from the word *pur*.) Because of everything written in this letter and because of what they had seen and what had happened to them, <sup>27</sup> the Jews took it on themselves to establish the custom that they and their descendants and all who join them should without fail observe these two days every year, in the way prescribed and at the time appointed. <sup>28</sup> These days should be remembered and

observed in every generation by every family, and in every province and in every city. And these days of Purim should never fail to be celebrated by the Jews—nor should the memory of these days die out among their descendants.

<sup>29</sup> So Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail, along with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter concerning Purim. <sup>30</sup> And Mordecai sent letters to all the Jews in the 127 provinces of Xerxes' kingdom—words of goodwill and assurance— <sup>31</sup> to establish these days of Purim at their designated times, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had decreed for them, and as they had established for themselves and their descendants in regard to their times of fasting and lamentation. <sup>32</sup> Esther's decree confirmed these regulations about Purim, and it was written down in the records.

#### *The Greatness of Mordecai*

10 King Xerxes imposed tribute throughout the empire, to its distant shores. <sup>2</sup> And all his acts of power and might, together with a full account of the greatness of Mordecai, whom the king had promoted, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Media and Persia? <sup>3</sup> Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Xerxes, preeminent among the Jews, and held in high esteem by his many fellow Jews, because he worked for the good of his people and spoke up for the welfare of all the Jews.

**Read to the Group:** Purim was not prescribed by Moses as part of the covenant, but is rather a celebration of the covenant faithfulness of God, as shown in the story of Esther. Purim is still celebrated by Jews today. *See Proverbs 16:33 for another usage of the same word: "The LOT (pur) is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord."*

**Ask the Group:** Throughout Scripture God instructs His people to commemorate the times when He acted to provide and save His people. Why is remembering God's acts of faithfulness important for us as Christians?

*Possible Answers: It gives God glory. Like Jews, Christians put their hope in God's faithfulness. However, Christians know more about that hope - namely, that it is found in Christ!*

**Ask the Group:** What is one thing that God has done for you that you would truly like to remember?

- **Ask the Group:** What are some ways you could celebrate it?

#### Part 3: I know the answer is Jesus...now what's the question?

**Read to the Group:** One challenge with Esther is that God's name and activity is not explicitly mentioned in the book. As followers of Christ, we should always ask the question, "How does the gospel inform my view of this?" In Romans 8, Paul addresses a situation where his audience may be suffering.

#### **Read: Romans 8:18-21**

<sup>18</sup> I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

**Ask the Group:** What "present sufferings" are occupying your thoughts today?

**Ask the Group:** What is “the glory that will be revealed in us”?

*Possible Answer: This refers to the redemption that will be experienced during Christ’s return, when the kingdom of God is fully realized within us.*

- **Ask the Group:** How does that impact your view of present sufferings?

*Possible Answer: This makes the “present sufferings” seem very small in comparison.*

**Ask the Group:** Having finished Esther, what would you identify as the key themes of the story?

*Possible Answers: God’s faithfulness and providence, God’s ability to raise up people for His purposes, the origin of the Purim celebration*

**Ask the Group:** What is our community application from this passage?

*Leader’s Note: You may choose to create your own application question as a group based on your discussion, or highlight a question from this study.*