

“VICTORY AND CELEBRATION”

I. Introduction

- A. These chapters record what could be seen as the Jewish equivalent of our nation’s victory over the British in the Revolutionary War
 - 1. The Jews overcome their enemies.
 - 2. They institute a feast to celebrate their great victory.
 - 3. And some of their number ended up with considerable influence in the world.
- B. It would be easy for someone to read these two chapters and conclude that this is nothing more than an expression of Jewish nationalism.
 - 1. But the only way a person could interpret this passage in a nationalistic sense is to read it apart from its wider context in the rest of Scripture.
 - 2. While God is not mentioned anywhere in Esther, those who read this book through biblical lenses cannot help but see God’s hand all over the place.
 - 3. The preservation of the people of Israel and the prestige that was enjoyed by Esther and Mordecai were not simply matters of national pride.
 - 4. These things demonstrated that God was being faithful to his covenant promises.
 - 5. He preserved Israel so that the salvation that he had promised to bring to the world through Israel would not be thwarted.

II. The Jews Destroy Their Enemies

- A. The passage begins by describing what took place on the day when the edicts of Haman and Mordecai collided.
1. Both edicts specified the thirteenth day of Adar as the day on which what they commanded was to be carried out.
 2. Haman's edict commanded the residents of Persia to annihilate the Jews and plunder their goods on this day.
 3. And Mordecai's edict said that the Jews were allowed to defend themselves against any who tried to carry out Haman's edict on this day.
 4. What will be the outcome in this battle of the edicts?
 5. The text does not leave us in suspense very long, telling us that "on the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, the reverse occurred: the Jews gained mastery over those who hated them."
 6. Instead of being victims, the Jews were victors.
- B. What was the cause of this great victory?
1. Was it the Jews' superior numbers? their superior weaponry? their superior strategy?
 2. It was not any of these things.
 3. As it says in verse 2, it was because "the fear of them had fallen on all peoples."
- C. Now, what would have caused that to happen?
1. What made the Jews so terrifying to their enemies?
 2. Did they paint themselves blue or something like that?
 3. There is no reason for us to think that the Jews did anything to make their enemies afraid of them.

4. Instead, what is said here reminds us of something that the Lord told his people back at the time of the conquest of Canaan.
 5. In Deuteronomy 2, God said, "This day I will begin to put the dread and fear of you on the peoples who are under the whole heaven, who shall hear the report of you and shall tremble and be in anguish because of you." (v. 25)
 6. In Deuteronomy 11, Moses said, "No one shall be able to stand against you. The LORD your God will lay the fear of you and the dread of you on all the land that you shall tread, as he promised you." (v. 25)
 7. And in Joshua 2, Rahab said to the spies, "I know that the LORD has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you." (v.9)
 8. These words were spoken in the context of holy war, in which God was going to use Israel to bring his judgment upon the Canaanites.
 9. As we noted in our study of Esther 8 last week, Mordecai's edict showed that God was going to do the same thing here.
 10. It was God who caused the enemies of the Jews to be terrified of them.
 11. And this underscores the fact that this victory belonged to the Lord.
- D. When the king told Esther about what had happened on the thirteenth day of Adar, he asked if she had any other requests.
1. Esther asked for two more things.
 2. First, she asked that the Jews be given one more day to carry out Mordecai's decree.

3. This would ensure the complete destruction of those who set themselves against God's people.
 4. Esther did not ask this because she was vindictive.
 5. This was what God commanded his people to do in situations of holy war.
 6. Esther wanted to make sure that God's people faithfully carried out this holy war against those who were under God's curse.
- E. This is closely related to Esther's second request.
1. She wanted the bodies of Haman's sons to be publicly hung.
 2. While this might seem unnecessarily gruesome, it made an important theological point.
 3. It declared that these men were under God's curse.
 4. Joshua did the same thing with the bodies of the Canaanite kings after the Israelites conquered them. (see Josh. 8:29; 10:26)
- F. One other detail in this account of the Jews' victory bears mentioning.
1. Three times in this passage we are told that the Jews laid no hands on the plunder.
 2. Mordecai's decree permitted them to take the plunder, but they refused to do so because they understood that this was a matter of holy war.
 3. By refusing to take the plunder, they avoided the sin that led to Saul's downfall in 1 Samuel 15.

4. They were not engaging in this warfare in order to enrich themselves but in order to be God's instrument in bringing judgment upon his enemies.

III. The Feast of Purim

- A. After the Jews gained mastery over those who hated them, they instituted a religious festival to memorialize this great moment in the history of God's people.
 1. This is one of only two Jewish feasts that were not instituted in the days of Moses.
 2. The other is Hanukkah, which celebrated the Maccabean revolt in the second century B.C.
 3. Apart from Purim and Hanukkah, all of Israel's other feasts were connected with the exodus, which was the key act of redemption in Old Testament history.
 4. But Purim was instituted because the Jews realized that a critical moment in the unfolding of God's plan of salvation had just taken place.
 5. The chosen race had been preserved from extinction.
 6. Esther and Mordecai rightly understood that God's deliverances need to be celebrated.
 7. By doing so, we are reminded of the connection between what God has done and who we are as his people.
- B. The name Purim points back to the historical events that it celebrates.
 1. Purim is the plural of the Hebrew word Pur, which means 'lots.'

2. You will recall that Haman cast lots back in chapter 3 in an attempt to discover the best time to hatch his plot against the Jews.
 3. One of the things that characterizes all of Israel's feasts is that they look back to key moments in the historical unfolding of God's plan of redemption.
 4. The faith of Old Testament saints was a faith that was rooted in history, and the same is true of the Christian faith.
 5. Your identity as a Christian is bound up with what God has done in past history.
 6. This is why it is important for us to celebrate God's historical acts of redemption.
- C. We do not celebrate Passover or Purim or other Old Testament feasts today, but we do have celebrations that mark God's mighty deeds of salvation within history.
1. The most important of these is the celebration that takes place fifty-two times per year: the Christian Sabbath or the Lord's Day.
 2. The Sabbath stands as the memorial of Christ's finished work.
 3. It serves as a foretaste of heaven.
 4. As we gather for worship each Lord's Day, we are being reminded that our lives are part of God's covenantal drama of redemption.
 5. The Sabbath helps you remember who you are.
- D. In addition to the Sabbath, we can deduce by good and necessary consequence that it is appropriate for us to set aside other times of celebration.

1. It is good for us to celebrate Christ's birth, death, resurrection, ascension, and the gift of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost.
2. It is fitting for us to use special days to rejoice and be glad over the great salvation that Christ has accomplished for us.

IV. A Friend in a High Place

- A. This brings us to chapter 10, where the focus is upon Mordecai's place of honor in the empire.
 1. But before getting to that, the chapter begins on a more sobering note.
 2. While Ahasuerus had previously issued a tax break to celebrate his marriage to Esther, he now re-institutes those taxes throughout his empire.
 3. Taxes were not any more popular in the ancient world than they are today.
 4. While the Jews were saved from annihilation, life hasn't really changed.
 5. They are still under foreign control, and they are going to have to pay taxes to support those who are over them.
- B. That being said, there is a note of hope here.
 1. Previously, the prime minister in the Persian empire was Haman, a man who is repeatedly identified in this book as "the enemy of the Jews."
 2. But now Haman's position has been given to a Jew, to a man who "sought the welfare of his people and spoke peace to all his people."
 3. Instead of having an enemy in a high place, they now have a friend in it.

4. It was great for the Jews that Mordecai was in this position, but the thing that we have to realize is that he did not remain in this high place forever.
 5. Things might work in their favor for awhile, but what will happen when Mordecai is gone and a new king arises who has no personal connection to Mordecai?
 6. The Jews had been through that sort of thing before.
 7. Remember what happened when a new king arose in Egypt who did not know Joseph?
- C. As Christians, we get excited when we gain cultural influence.
1. We rejoice when our candidate is elected, when a sports hero professes his faith in Christ, whenever Christianity looks impressive in terms of its place in the wider culture.
 2. But we always need to remember that these things are not the ultimate answer to what is wrong with this world.
 3. Those who place their hope in cultural influence are setting themselves up for perpetual disappointment, because such influence does not last.
- D. As I was thinking about this, I remembered something that I experienced ten years ago when I was living in Seattle.
1. It was the day after George W. Bush won his second term for President, and my friend and I went to listen to a lecture being given by an author whom we both appreciated, an author named Wendell Berry.
 2. Now, this author appeals to people with varying political views, but in a city that is as politically liberal as Seattle, the audience for this lecture was almost entirely made up of people from the liberal end of the spectrum.

3. Berry did not talk about politics in his lecture, but the questions that people asked afterward were all about politics.
 4. These people were distraught over what was happening to their country.
 5. My friend and I quickly realized that we had better keep quiet about who we voted for the previous day if we wanted to get out of there in one piece.
 6. That was only ten years ago, but the political situation has changed dramatically in our nation.
 7. This just goes to show that even when we have friends in high places, it doesn't last.
- E. Mordecai was not the ultimate answer to the problems that were confronting the Jews in Esther's day.
1. He made things better for a time, but that time didn't last.
 2. That being said, I think that we can say that Mordecai does point us to the One who is our true source of hope.
 3. Mordecai is a typological foreshadowing of Christ.
 4. Jesus seeks the welfare of his people in the ultimate sense.
 5. He is our advocate with the Father.
 6. He is interceding for us at the highest place: at God's right hand.
 7. He has secured abiding peace for us by the blood of his cross.

V. Conclusion

- A. There is nothing wrong with wanting our circumstances in the world to improve.
- B. There is nothing wrong with doing what is within our power to improve our circumstances, as long as it is lawful.
- C. But we should never think that we will be able to secure lasting peace and prosperity by worldly means.
- D. Christ, and Christ alone, is the One in whom God blesses us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.