

1. My lesson title is as follows "overcoming fear by trusting God, winning and celebrating". Yes that is a mouthful, but believe it or not, that is a good summary of these final two chapters. They are about the Jewish people overcoming their fears about being killed, willing to trust God to guide them through these difficult events and then celebrating how He had worked in their lives.
 - a) OK John, as you like to say, so what? The issue for us is not about learning events from ancient and modern history, although there is a lot of that here. The underlying point of this lesson is not so much about understanding the plight of the Jewish people, but about learning to trust God through our fears and learning how to thank Him for the victories He does provide for us when we do trust in Him. To explain that further, I am going to need the rest of this lesson. At this point, let me talk about celebrating:
 - b) You may recall from my first lesson on Esther, I talked about an old expression that all of the Jewish holidays can be summarized in three short sentences. They are: They tried to kill us, we won, and let's eat. I mention that again here, because in this final lesson in the book of Esther, we are going to read of the formation of a Jewish holiday that is celebrated worldwide by Jewish people to this day. It is the feast of Purim. This feast and national holiday is literally based on the events of these two chapters.
 - c) OK John, so the Jewish people celebrate this event to this day. Good for them. How does that affect me? Do we Christians have to celebrate this as well? If we are not Jewish, it is not a requirement. The feast of Purim is only one of two holidays celebrated by religious Jews not ordained by Moses himself. The other one is a Hanukkah which I'll explain another day. In the mean time, let me talk about how this holiday affects us Christians:
 - i) The short answer for Christians is not much. The more important issue is about Christians and celebrations. One thing I have seen from my many years of living the Christian life is believers are much better at dealing with sorrow than we are at happiness. Too many Christians I know are generally negative in their outlook. The bible teaches us a lot about how to deal with sorrow. Believers turn to God and friends for comfort. My point is Christians are good at dealing with suffering.
 - ii) At the same time, I'm not impressed with how Christian dealings with celebrating. Maybe it is the fact I tend to be introverted. Maybe it is just my observations of watching Christians celebrate things over the years. My point is I don't see a lot of joy in Christians when it comes to truly celebrating. We tend to sigh and think, "Let's all thank God for our victory here, and then go back to our misery." ☺
 - iii) For what it is worth, I just had some wonderful news this past weekend where I have seen God do some great things in my own life. I too, gave a quick thank you prayer and let it go at that. My point is I too lack an ability to celebrate how God is working in my life. Therefore, I see this lesson as being helpful to me as well as anyone else reading it.
 - d) So why celebrate how God is working in our lives? This comes back to the issue of letting others see joy in our lives. Think of it this way, would you rather be around people who are miserable or happy? If others see us being happy most of the time, they would want to be around that joy. That is why most Christians including myself need to learn how to celebrate when God does great things in our lives.
 - e) OK, before we break out the champagne, we should read about actually winning the battle that is explained in the text of this lesson. What is interesting to consider is that the final two chapters of this book, (Chapter 10 is the shortest in the bible) have more verses to talk about the celebration and the victory than it does the actual battle itself. That's a clue. ☺
 - f) Oh, and before I forget, since this is the final lesson in Esther, I give my list of sources is at the end of this lesson if anyone wants further study.

2. Chapter 9, Verse 1: 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.
 - a) Let's start with some time references. The actual year is not as significant as the specific month and days. This king reigned from 486 to 465 BC. This event happened at that time.
 - i) The month of Adar is based on a lunar cycle (28 days) that occurs in February and March. The original order to kill all the Jews happened almost a year earlier.
 - ii) In the last chapter, one of the main characters, Mordecai wrote a new order saying in effect that all Jewish people had a right to defend themselves. That order was written roughly in May or June of the previous year. My main point is the events in Chapter 9 are roughly eight to nine months after events of the previous chapter.
 - iii) And I should know this because? To know that there was a good sized time gap between the events of this chapter and the events of the previous chapter. That time gap gave the Jewish people time to spread the word through all of the empire as well time to get organized in order to defend themselves.
 - iv) This also leads back to the villain of our story, Haman (boo, one last time). When he first wanted to issue the decree to kill all of the Jews, he in effect, rolled dice to try to discover when he should carry out this plan. The idea is that if the "dice" (it was actually another method, but I'll use our dice to explain it) kept coming up say, twelve that was a sign that his gods were controlling the events of time.
 - a) The main point is, there was almost a one-year gap between the time of the original plan and the date of this event. Maybe Haman figured with that long of a time gap, the Jewish people had more time to fear the inevitable.
 - b) There is a Hebrew word used twice in this verse. The first time it is translated here with "overpower". The second time it is used to describe the Jewish people getting the "upper hand". OK, so what?
 - i) When Haman issued the first decree, almost a year before the actual event was to take place, those who hated the Jewish people had hoped that this was their big opportunity to destroy them. It shows in effect that nothing has changed in history about anti-Jewish feelings. So why were the Jewish people hated by others in that empire? Because God made some of them successful. It is not that every person from a Jewish background was well off, but some were. The history of that empire records that a lot of bankers had Jewish backgrounds. In summary, this is about stealing the possessions of those people they hated anyway.
 - ii) Remember that the actual event has not occurred yet. The point here is that now those who had planned on stealing from God's chosen people were in fear for their own lives based on the new decree. One can see the "hand of God" working in the background here to protect those who did trust in Him.
 - iii) Now let me explain why I brought this up. The opposite of faith in God is fear. We fear how we are going to pay our bills. We fear what is going to happen to our future. We fear when we get sick or someone we love is in a lot of pain. In life, bad things are going to happen. Here was a death order given to all of God's chosen people. It caused great fear among those who believed in Him. Now a new order was given to overcome the first order. Now instead of the Jewish people living in fear, those who would want to hurt God's people were in fear.
 - iv) OK John, we don't get government orders to overcome our problems. How does this affect us? The point is God allows tragedies to happen in our lives in order to test us. It is God's way of saying, "Do you still trust Me, even through this? God is in effect asking us to pray our way through these situations. He in His own way and timing does work out life for His glory just as He did in this situation here.

3. Verse 2: The Jews assembled in their cities in all the provinces of King Xerxes to attack those seeking their destruction. No one could stand against them, because the people of all the other nationalities were afraid of them.
- a) Now we read of the preparation prior to the battle itself. The new command issued throughout the empire was that the Jewish people had the right to defend themselves. Therefore, we read here of Jewish people assembling together for this battle.
 - b) The key point is the second sentence. It states that no one could stand against them because people of other nationalities were afraid of them.
 - i) My personal view is that the Jewish people did not have better weapons or even a larger supply of weapons. I believe God put fear into those who wished to attack them. This gets back to my issue of dealing with fear. When we do put our trust in God, He helps us to deal with our fears and He also has the power to put fear into those who want to harm us. Remember that no one knows the outcome of the battle yet. At the same time, it was the enemy of the Jewish people who were now in fear, and not the Jews themselves. That alone should tell you who will win.
 - ii) OK John, suppose my fears have nothing to do with physical battles. Suppose my fears are over a health issue or a financial worry. How do I defend myself in those situations and who is the one attacking me? Fear is a weapon used by demons to get us to not pray and not put our trust in God. Fear of what could happen to us is what prevents us from trusting in Him. My point is the way to overcome our problems is not only to pray our way through them, but trust that God is working out our lives for His glory no matter what the outcome our situation.
4. Verse 3: 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. ⁴ Mordecai was prominent in the palace; his reputation spread throughout the provinces, and he became more and more powerful.
- a) When I studied the history of this empire, it was estimated that there were about eight to nine million people and only about one million of them were Persians. My point is this was a large number of people and they were organized in groups. Those in charge of running the empire were called satraps, who ruled over governors of regions. There were also nobles (think important people). Even with this established structure in place, we have Mordecai, a palace guard in the capital who rose to be the leader over all of them.
 - i) The point here is that Mordecai lead in a way that he was respected (or maybe even feared) by the other leaders throughout the empire.
 - ii) OK, so what? It shows how God was working out His plan for their lives. Despite all the fear all of the Jews had about the original "kill" order, one of their own was being raised in power to overcome this issue. The point is when we have our fears about bad things that can happen to us, in ways we may not be aware of, God is working in our lives so that He does triumph over evil that occurs.
 - iii) But John, in the last hundred years alone, there have been lots of horrible tragedies one can point to and ask where was God? Think of all the genocides that were committed by government leaders, let alone murderous acts by other individuals. Where was God then, if He is working out our lives for His glory? The answer is that He never promises our lives will be long and prosperous. He does promise that life does work out for His glory when we do put our trust in Him.
 - iv) I trust in a God that rights the wrongs of this world. The only reason I even can sleep at night is if I accept in the existence of a God that would judge the world fairly. If there is no God, this world would be a very unfair place to live. Stories like Esther remind us that there is a God and He is working out the world for His glory despite the tragedies that do occur. In effect, we put our trust in Him, as that is still the best and only hope we have to enjoy our eternal destiny.

5. Verse 5: 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. ⁶ In the citadel of Susa, the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men.
- a) Now we come to the actual battle through the empire. In summary, it was a Jewish route. Those people who thought they would get the possession of the Jewish people by this battle lost badly. Notice that the new order did not prevent the war from happening. It is as if the enemies of the Jewish people were thinking, forget the order that they have the right to defend themselves. The "dice" fell on this day and this is our big opportunity to destroy them. It is amazing to stand back and see how God works. It is amazing to watch today the efforts being made to wipe out the Jewish nation by other nations surrounding them. Just as I have confidence in the "God of the Jewish people" back then, so I also have confidence that the same God is working out salvation for that nation today.
 - b) Like I enjoy saying every so often: "The biggest mistake most Jewish people make is they fail to see Jesus as their promised Messiah. The biggest mistake many Christians make is they fail to see God as a Jewish God." OK John, I'll bite. If the Jewish nation has rejected Jesus, why does God still watch out for that nation? For starters, it is because He made an unconditional promise to them that the land of Israel belongs to them. Therefore, when Jesus returns, He needs to return to the nation of Israel to accept Him. That is why I see the necessity of the existence of modern Israel in order to welcome the Messiah, which is another title for Jesus.
 - c) Meanwhile, back at the war front, ☺ in the capital city of Susa, the war was taking place. In that city, 500 men were killed by the Jewish people. OK, why is that fact mentioned?
 - i) First it is to show that not everyone in this large city was anti-Jewish. It was only a specific group who were set on trying to destroy them. I don't even know how many Jewish people it took to win the battle, but my personal guess is that it was less than the 500 they had killed. I usually find that God works with a few willing to trust in Him in order to overcome enemies that are usually larger in number.
 - ii) The point for us is there usually comes a day or a time in our life when we have to actually face our fears. Even though our enemy may outnumber us, God is more than willing to give us victory over our fears if we are willing to trust Him to have victory over situations that we fear in our lives.
6. Verse 7: They also killed Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, ⁸ Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, ⁹Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai and Vaizatha, ¹⁰ the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. But they did not lay their hands on the plunder.
- a) These three short verses mention the fact that Haman's ten sons were among the people that attacked the Jews and they were among the 500 that were killed. So why did these sons of Hamann attack the Jewish people? For starters, they were probably angry that the queen ordered their father to be killed. They were angry that the government took away their home and possessions as mentioned in the last chapter. These sons were also part of the tribe of the Amalakites that were the traditional enemies of the Jews. The point is that those who want to do us harm usually have plenty of excuses to do so. The issue is not to understand our enemies rage, but to do the right thing. The right thing is standing up for the God of the bible, and at times like this even defending ourselves by killing those who want to who want to take our lives or the lives of other believers.
 - b) OK, so why are each of the sons named individually? I suspect it is to show the end of the long war between the Jewish people and the Amalakites. Think of it this way: King Saul, centuries earlier, lost his kingship, because he failed to kill everyone in this group. Now we have Mordecai, a descendant of Saul who ordered to finish the job that Saul should have done: wipe out any last remnant of this group. Were these ten sons the last of that group? I don't know, but there is no further mention of them after this time. I also think there is another prophetic reason for this event, and I'll come to that in a little bit.

7. Verse 11: The number of those slain in the citadel of Susa was reported to the king that same day.
¹² 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."
- a) The scene now switches back to the king's palace. The king gets the report that 500 men were killed in the city includes the 10 sons of Haman. The king then says to Esther in effect, "OK honey, the battle is now over here in our city. What do you want to do now?"
 - i) It's almost as if the king is standing on the "Jewish sideline" and says, "OK honey, you have won so far. I don't know what you want to do next about this situation, but I as the king want to be on the winning side of this issue, and since your team has won big time, you decide what is best to do next."
 - ii) It is not that the king is turning over running the kingdom to Esther as much as he is just turning over this particular situation to her and Mordecai to deal with.
 - b) Remember that the king is not Jewish. However, he obviously saw how Mordecai grew in prominence among all of the leaders of the Persian Empire. The king is probably thinking at this point, "I've done good to trust in Esther and Mordecai so far. I should ask her what to do next in this situation."
 - c) It is amazing to watch the growth of Esther's boldness since she first confronted the king on this issue roughly eight months earlier. Before she was too scared to even speak up. Now that she was on a role trusting God to work through her. The king was now willing to trust her as to what was best to do next. Remember that she humbled herself before Him even to ask for "just life" for the Jewish people. Now that the Jewish people have won the battle the king is saying to her, "You decide what to do next".
 - i) My point is overcoming our fears requires taking faith in steps. Because Esther was willing to step out in faith, God worked a mighty salvation through her. Her faith had grown to where God and the king can then ask us, "what do you want to do next, now that you have the boldness to make a difference for Him?"
8. Verse 13: "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 hanged on gallows."
- a) The queen (Esther's) response was in effect, "Let us have one more day of war in order to see if there is anyone else who wants to attack my people." This order was only for the city of Susa and not the entire empire. Remember that Haman organized this plot and there may be others who worked with him. This is Esther saying in effect, there still may be others lurking around the city who want to harm my people. Let a new order be decreed throughout Susa that the Jews can organize and defend themselves again.
 - b) The second order of business was about hanging the ten sons of Haman on gallows. Remember that they were already killed that day. The point of hanging them was to be a public witness against anyone else who wanted to kill the Jewish people. It was Esther's public statement that anyone else trying to kill my people will meet the same fate as these ten men who are publicly hanged for all to see.
 - c) I stated on the previous page that there was a prophetic reason for mentioning the names of each of the ten sons of Haman. It's time for me to explain the historical significance. If you read those ten names in the original Hebrew text, they are listed in column format. It would be like saying "And this son (#1 by name is killed). The next line would read "And this son (#2 by name is killed). By listing each son on a separate line, it hints of reputation of this event over and over again. This leads me to my favorite part about this lesson:
 - i) To begin, let's fast forward to roughly our time era. In 1946 after World War Two, was over, there were trials held in Nuremberg, Germany over those Nazi leaders who plotted to have all the Jewish people killed during that war. To explain this further, I need to explain some of the facts that occurred around that modern time frame between Hitler and the German people.

- ii) Know that Hitler himself banned the observance of the Jewish holiday Purim that remembers this event. He declared it a capital offense to own a copy of the Book of Esther. In a speech made on November 10, 1938, a Nazi leader named Julius Streicher said that just as the Jews butchered 75,000 Persians (See Verse 16 in this chapter) in one night, the same fate would have befallen the German people had the Jewish people succeeded in inciting a war against us. Hitler assumed that they would have instituted a new Purim festival in Germany, which never happened.
 - iii) Also know that many of the Nazi attacks against Jews often coincided with Purim. On Purim 1942, ten Jews were hanged in Zduńska Wola to avenge the hanging of Haman's ten sons. On Purim in 1943, the Nazis shot 10 Jews from the Piotrków ghetto. On Purim eve that same year, the Nazis shot over 100 Jewish doctors and their families in Czechoslovakia. The next day, Jewish doctors were taken from random and shot from a nearby city.
 - iv) In an apparent connection made by Hitler between his Nazi regime and the role of Haman, he stated in a speech made on January 30, 1944, that if the Nazis were ever defeated, the Jews could celebrate a second Purim feast.
- d) OK John, and why are you sharing all of this history with us? To answer, I need to share something about the way the names of three of the sons were written. In most Hebrew bibles, three letters in the Hebrew names of the ten sons are traditionally written smaller:
 - i) The taf (a letter of the Hebrew alphabet) of the son of Haman named Parshandata.
 - ii) The shin (another letter of that alphabet) of the son named Parmashta
 - iii) The zayin (another letter) of the son named Vizata.
 - iv) OK John, one more time, so what? The three letters together form taf-shin-zayin, which in that order spells the Jewish year 5707 (1946 C.E.), the year that ten Nazi criminals were executed. Of the 23 war criminals tried at Nuremberg, Germany, eleven were in fact sentenced to execution by hanging. Just two hours before the sentence was due to be carried out, one of the eleven (Goering) committed suicide. In effect the Ten descendants of Amalek were hung, thus fulfilling the request of Esther: "let Haman's ten sons be hanged."
 - v) Furthermore, although the trial was conducted by a military tribunal, the sentence handed down was not the normal death by firing squad, but the court specifically prescribed hanging, exactly as in Esther's prophetic request:
 - a) These facts were taken from an article published by Dr. James Trim.
 - b) <http://nazarenespace.com/profiles/blogs/the-prophecy-of-ester>
- e) OK, that is a neat little story. I'm glad some of the Jewish people got some revenge after the tragedies of the Second World War. How does any of this affect my life today?
 - i) The point is not just that history repeats itself, but that God is still working in our world today. Despite the horrors that happened because of the holocaust, one can still see God working today. If He can make it so that the ten main villains were hung during Esther's time, it can happen again during our time.
 - ii) This leads to the current issues today between Iran and Israel. I don't know details of what is going to happen between those countries, but I know the outcome will be His will. Our job is to take a bold stand for Him and His people, and live to make a difference for Him. My point is God's word will come true on His timing. We saw it happen after World War II, and I am sure it will happen again with whatever happens between Iran and Israel.
 - iii) How does this affect us in our own world? The point is just as God can and does work on a grand scale, He is also interested in our own lives. The main goal that God wants for our lives is to grow in faith in Him. He is always more than willing to work on our level in our lives to grow boldly in our faith of Him.
 - iv) Meanwhile, it's time to get back to Esther.

9. Verse 14: So the king commanded that this be done. An edict was issued in Susa, and they hanged the ten sons of Haman.¹⁵ 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.
- a) In Verse 14, we read of the hanging of the 10 sons of Susa. Since I've beaten that point to death and it's historical significance, I won't say anymore, other than to remind us again that they were hanged after they died as a public warning against any further rebellion against the Jewish people.
 - b) The text then goes on to say in say that on the next day after the main event, 300 more men within the City of Susa who tried to kill the Jewish people were put to death.
 - c) Finally, we get an interesting little fact that the Jewish people did not take any possessions (called plunder in Verse 15) of those they killed. Why is that?
 - i) To answer, first a little more history. When the Jewish people came out of Egypt, they were told to take possessions of the Egyptians. Those possessions were used to help make the first Jewish Tabernacle and gave the Israelites some supplies, as they were to survive through the desert for the next forty years. The Egyptians were in a lot of pain after the ten plagues were probably happy to give their stuff to the Jewish people to say in effect, "Take what you want, just get out of here."
 - a) See Exodus Chapter 12:35 for support of this story.
 - ii) So, if it was ok to take the "plunder" when they left Egypt, why did the Jewish people refuse to take the possessions of those who tried to kill them here? My personal view is that they wanted to be a witness to other residents of Susa.
 - a) The message is, "We don't care about your stuff, we just want to live out our own lives and not be killed." The Israelites took possession when they left Egypt as God told them to do so. They didn't take possessions here in order to be a good witness to the other citizens around them.
 - d) OK John, enough ancient history. How does this affect me? The simple point is that whenever possible, God does call on us to defend ourselves, but not to take from those who are trying to hurt us. The point is He wants us to live to make a difference for Him. He does call us on us to learn how to defend our faith (i.e., know enough about what we believe so that we can answer those who criticize our beliefs), but not to steal what does not belong to us.
 - i) OK, as best I can tell, no one is trying to kill me right now. Why should I care about all of this stuff? It is about being willing to have boldness for Jesus. If we are willing to take steps in faith to do something (anything) for Him, I can promise there will be spiritual resistance. As I also like to say every now and then, if you don't believe Satan is real, try opposing Him for awhile and watch what happens.
 - ii) Meanwhile, I keep wandering away from the story itself.
10. Verse 16: 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.¹⁷ 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.
- a) We are reading here of the results of the war. The Jews killed a total of 75,000 people. To put it in perspective, there were estimated to be about eight to nine million people living in the Persian Empire. So why do we get the statistic about how many were killed? It is to show how widespread the hatred of the Jewish people was. Despite the second order about the Jewish people having the right to defend themselves, people were still making efforts to attack them throughout the empire.
 - b) The text also emphasizes how none of the Jewish people throughout the empire took the possessions (plunder) of those who attacked them. I assume memo's went out in order to prevent this. ☺ I also assume that was a big temptation for people to take those things.

- c) As I read this chapter a few times, I noticed the big emphasis on the specific day and month that this event occurred. I suspect the reason for that is because Esther and Mordecai were trying to start a new national holiday based on that event. We will get to the specifics of that holiday in a moment.
 - i) First, consider how difficult it is to just start a new national Jewish feast day. All of the Jewish holidays up to this point were ordained by Moses. For any Jewish person to start a new holiday other than one ordained by Moses is a challenge to put it mildly. From what I read of history, it even took a while for acceptance of this event as a time of national celebration.
 - ii) My simple point here is to notice how much effort the author of the book of Esther (I believe it was Mordecai) went to, in order to emphasize the specific days that this event occurred in history.
 - iii) Meanwhile, the battle is still going on.
- 11. Verse 18: 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. ¹⁹ 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.
 - a) To keep it simple, the Jewish people who lived outside of the city of Susa had a one day battle and celebrated the next day. The Jewish people living in Susa had a two day battle and celebrated on the third day.
 - b) It's time for me to talk a little more about this Jewish holiday. It is nicknamed the Jewish version of Halloween (unfortunately) because children dress up as one of the characters from this story and parade around Jewish areas. Plays are often performed by children who act out the story of Esther on this holiday. It is a time of celebration. Among many religious Jews, there is a tradition of drinking alcohol in order to share in the happiness of this holiday. There are some religious Jews who never drink other than at this time.
 - c) So should Christians celebrate this holiday? This specific holiday was never mentioned by Jesus or anyone else in the New Testament for that matter. I would argue that it is a Jewish thing, and should be kept as such. What we can learn from this holocaust is the importance of having feasts to commemorate important events. A rough equivalent for Americans might be the "4th of July" where we remember how our country started.
 - i) My point is not that there are times to get drunk. My point is we should take time out of our lives to remember how God has worked in the past. That way, when we are struggling over some future issue, we can remember, "If God has worked in a mighty way before, He can and will work it again. Therefore, we should trust Him to guide our lives through whatever it is we are dealing with right now." That is why we should take the time to celebrate every now and then.
 - ii) Meanwhile, hold off on our next drink until we finish this lesson. ☺
- 12. Verse 20: Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Xerxes, near and far, ²¹ to have them celebrate annually the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar ²² 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.
 - a) As I stated, the writer of Esther goes to a lot of trouble to emphasize the specific date and month when this event occurred so that Jewish people would always remember this date.
 - b) Verse 22 summarizes the whole story of Esther from the perspective of the average Jewish person living in empire. That thought is again, essentially, "They tried to kill us, we won and let's eat". As I said on Page 1, that is a simple summary of many Jewish holidays that include the feast of Esther.

- c) Let me talk a little more about the celebration: The idea is not just that one has say, a drink of alcohol to toast Esther and Mordecai. The text says that gifts are given to one another. It also says gifts are given to the poor so that they too can celebrate this holiday.
 - i) John, this sounds more like a Christmas holiday than Halloween. Remember that some people compare it to Halloween only because their children wear costumes.
 - ii) The point is it is more than a 10-second celebration. It doesn't go year around, but at the same time, it is a day or two long celebration in order to remember that God is always working in our lives in the background so that His will gets done.
 - iii) Remember that God is not mentioned in the book of Esther. Yet, once one studies this story, one can see the "hand of God" working throughout the story so that His people do win despite the tragedies of this story.
 - iv) Just like the tragedy of the holocaust of World War II, God is still working out the details on His timing. That event led the world leaders to allow Israel to form a country again. My point is God often allows horrible things to happen, ultimately for His glory. That holocaust event led Israel to be an independent country for the first time since the Babylonian Captivity. In the history of the world, no country has ever been scattered and came back together again as a single country, except for the nation of Israel. If one needs proof that God exists, that gathering together of the nation of Israel alone is a great support for His existence.
 - v) Meanwhile, we still have more verses to cover in Esther:
- 13. Verse 23: So the Jews agreed to continue the celebration they had begun, doing what Mordecai had written to them. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ 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 hanged on the gallows. ²⁶ (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, ²⁷ the Jews took it upon 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. ²⁸ 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 cease to be celebrated by the Jews, nor should the memory of them die out among their descendants.
 - a) I have to admit these verses trouble me in that they seem to be repetitive. One could have simply said, "The Jewish people started a tradition to remember this event."
 - i) The question is, why repeat much of the main plot points of the story of Esther in these verses? My personal view is that so when the Jewish people celebrate this event it is to remember the details as told in this story.
 - ii) As I stated, I believe to establish a new national Jewish holiday at this point took guts because Jewish people honor the writings of Moses more than the rest of the books of the Old Testament. It is to say, "Yes I know Moses commanded that we observe these specific holidays. I, Mordecai am now asking Jewish people to add one more holiday to our calendar and that is this feast."
 - b) The holiday is called "Purim". That is the plural form of the word "pur". That word refers to the dice-like object that Haman used to determine the date of this event. If you recall, the idea is that God controls the dice in that if a certain number comes up over and over again, it means that God is behind that date. Haman believed that his gods were behind that date to seal the fate of the Jewish people. It turns out of course, that God Himself was behind that date to save His people and make this date (two days) a national holiday.
 - c) At this point, let me come back to my theme of "trusting God and celebrations". The reason God wants us to celebrate every now and then is to take the time to remember how

He has worked in the past. Let me put it this way: When things are going wrong and we don't know what to do next, that is usually when God does His best work. That way we can only give Him the credit and not ourselves. By remembering past times where God has worked, it reminds us that He is there and is willing to work in our lives for His glory.

- i) Are you saying that we as Christians should celebrate Purim? No, but we should take the time to celebrate God in our own ways. As I stated in my introduction, Christians are often really good at being miserable and don't celebrate enough. We are good at being "holier than thou" and are not people that others want to be around. I'm not saying we should get drunk and invite the neighbors. I am saying that people should see the joy in our hearts and our lives. That positive attitude should be prevalent in the lives of believers.

- 14. Verse 29: So Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail, along with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter concerning Purim.³⁰ And Mordecai sent letters to all the Jews in the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Xerxes--words of goodwill and assurance--³¹ 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.³² Esther's decree confirmed these regulations about Purim, and it was written down in the records.

- a) Most of what we read in these verses recall facts that were already stated. However, we do get an interesting new fact in Verse 29: Esther's mother's name is given. My guess is that as Mordecai raised her, he saw the physical resemblance to her mother and maybe she even acted in the same way. With that thought of "Esther turned out to be the type of person who feared God like her mother", she, along with Mordecai who raised her, wrote together this decree that all the Jewish people should celebrate this holiday.
- b) The main point here is that an order was officially written for Jewish people to celebrate the holiday called "Purim" which is to remember the main events of the book of Esther.
 - i) This order was sent to every province in this vast empire (all 127 provinces) that the Jewish people should remember this event and celebrate this holiday.
 - ii) Remember that other than the king himself, Esther and Mordecai were probably the two most powerful people in the Persian Empire. They had the power and the ability to carry out this order through out the kingdom. You may recall from previous lessons on Esther, a lot of details were given about how orders were to be carried out in that empire. Maybe those instructions were included to show that Mordecai had the authority and knowledge how such orders were carried out.
 - iii) The text mentions how the decrees were written in the "records". Remember that orders given by Persian law were not revocable. My point is the Jewish people probably started celebrating this event because they were forced to, and it stuck as a habit that has gone through history since that time period.
 - iv) The text also remembers the fact that the Jewish people who lived in Susa fasted on behalf of Esther prior to this event happening. The idea of "lamentation" is that all the Jewish people living throughout the empire were worried about how God was working through this time.
- c) OK, good for them. Most of us are not Jewish. Explain why we should care? The point is not so that we can invite ourselves over to our Jewish friends homes in order to celebrate this holiday with them. (Again, hold off on that drink until I finish this lesson. ☺) The point is to understand that God wants us to have the boldness to seek Him through our fears. Next, we should recall how God has worked in our lives and even celebrate His victories. That way, the next time, life gets hard, we can recall how God is willing to work in our lives if we are willing to trust Him through those events.

15. Chapter 10, Verse 1: King Xerxes imposed tribute throughout the empire, to its distant shores.
 - a) Chapter 10 is a strange little chapter. It is only three verses long and I admit I wonder why they made this a separate chapter. Anyway, it is here and let's deal with it.
 - b) This chapter begins with a strange statement. In all of this surrounding "happy talk" about victory, and celebrations of the Jewish people, we get this odd statement that the king imposed a tax upon the entire empire. The big question is, why is this here?
 - i) My first thought is that life goes on. Despite the happiness that the Jewish people would not be killed, life moves forward. Most of us know the expression, "What are the two things in life that are permanent? Death and taxes." That means no matter who we are in life or where we go, we can't avoid those two.
 - a) So in spite of the happiness of these chapters, "life goes on" and taxes is a way of saying life goes on.
 - ii) The second explanation I read goes back to something from Chapter 2. Back then the king gave a temporary remission of taxes to celebrate his marriage to Esther. (See Chapter 2, Verse 18). Many bible commentators see this verse reversing that decree and saying, "OK, folks, the holiday is over. It's time for everyone to get back to work, and yes, time for everyone to pay their taxes again." I don't know if that is the actual case here, but that is as good an explanation as any for this verse.
 - c) Meanwhile, we still have some more epilogue verses to this chapter. In effect Chapter 10 answers the question: What happens to the main characters after this holiday is over. In effect, Verse 1 is saying, "The king went back to doing what politicians do best, impose taxes on those under them." With that tough reminder finished, let's go to more positive thoughts in Verse 2.
16. Verse 2: And all his acts of power and might, together with a full account of the greatness of Mordecai to which the king had raised him, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Media and Persia? ³ 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.
 - a) I like to summarize these verses this way: The king did not say to Mordecai, "OK, now that your enemies are dead. It's time for you to go back to just being a city official."
 - i) Instead, Mordecai stayed as the number two main power. He was thought of very highly by the Jewish people and he was considered a good leader.
 - ii) If you want more evidence that Mordecai himself wrote this book, think about the praise given to him to end this chapter. You have to admit it would feed his ego to speak of how well he does as the number two man in the kingdom.
 - iii) Maybe that is why the text refers to Mordecai as "Mordecai the Jew". He was proud of his Jewish heritage and how God used him at this point in his life.
 - b) In summary this too was a happy time for Esther and Mordecai. I'm sure they lived out full lives at this point. The text doesn't say how their lives ended or when their reigns were over. History does record that a son of the king (not through Esther) did become the next king of the empire. Did Esther and Mordecai still have problems for the rest of their lives? Probably as everyone did. The point here is that they turned to God when things got tough, they fasted and presumably prayed their way through these problems. Then Esther had the boldness to speak up, and things turned out well. Finally a new holiday was ordained in order for the Jewish people to remember this event.
17. If you walk away from this lesson and this study of Esther just thinking, the Jewish people won a big battle and made a holiday out of it, you missed the main point of this lesson. This lesson is about trusting God through our fears, and learning how to properly celebrate when God does come through to help us with our trials and difficulties. As I stated in the introduction, many Christians are really good at "suffering" and don't spend enough time having joy in their lives. This chapter gave us lessons on how God wants us to celebrate victories in our lives.

18. On that happy, thought, we can break open the champagne now, right after this closing prayer:
- a) Let's pray, heavenly Father, we thank You for the victories you have given us in our life. Help us to take time to celebrate how You have worked in our life. Help us to take the time to show that joy to others around us, so that we too can make a difference in this world. Help us to trust that You are working in our lives, especially when we don't know what is going to happen next. When we get relief from our difficult situations, may we then appreciate and celebrate those victories. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.

Supplement: Bibliography

"If I have seen further, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants." (Isaac Newton)

Without prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, all these commentaries are useless. My prayer as I prepare these lessons was for God to show me the things He wanted *me* to learn, and second, the lessons He wanted me to pass on in my writings. I have quoted many sources throughout these lessons. If any of these writers appeal to you, I invite you to read or listen to them further via the places listed below. I have also quoted other sources not listed, and those names are usually listed in the lessons. These other authors were usually quoted from the materials listed below and taken from those sources.

First and foremost, the greatest commentary on the bible is the bible itself. Here are the bible versions I use in preparation of my lessons. I mostly quote The New International Version (NIV), Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society; The New King James Version (NKJV), Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.; The King James Version (KJV) (no copyright on that version); the English Standard Version. (ESV). The copyright information for the ESV is in point #9 below. The Living Bible (TLB) Copyright © 1971, 1986 by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189; "The Message" copyright © 1993 by Eugene H. Peterson. All rights reserved. All the bible text used in these lessons (except the ESV) is taken from Parsons Software: Electronic Edition STEP Files Copyright © 1999, Parsons Technology, Inc., all rights reserved and from Zondervan Reference Software (32-bit edition) Version 2.6, Copyright © 1989-1998 The Zondervan Corporation.

Here are the commentaries I have referenced over these lessons. The specific commentaries on the book of Esther is listed first, and then the bible-wide commentaries. They are listed in alphabetical order by author. The reference to audio commentary means the information was gathered via the Internet in MP3® Format, unless otherwise stated:

1. Commentary on Esther by Jon Courson. It is in book form from Harvest House Publishing. It is also available in MP3® format at <http://www.joncourson.com/>.
2. Commentary on Esther by Bob Davies. They are available for free in MP3® format at http://northcountrychapel.com/audio_studies/tapelist.php?book_id=58.
3. Commentary on Esther by Dr. David Hocking, available for purchase in MP3® format at <http://app.hftm.org/category.do?id=81321>
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5. Esther, A Woman of Strength and Dignity by Dr. Chuck Swindoll. Copyright 1997 by Charles R. Swindoll, Published by Word Publishing Inc. Nashville Tennessee. ISBN: 0-8449-1383-7.
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10. The Life Application Bible, Zondervan Publishing: www.zondervanbibles.com/0310919770.htm.
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12. I also refer sometimes to Greg Koukl's apologetic ministry, which is Stand to Reason at www.str.org.