

4. What did Esther do with all the property?

In the Persian Empire, it was customary to seize the property of the condemned criminal which would be appropriated by the throne. I read that apparently, the same custom was followed in Israel. After Queen Jezebel had the vineyard owner, Naboth, falsely condemned and executed, she advised her husband, King Ahab, to take possession of Naboth's property (1 Kings 21:7-16).

5. Why do you think the king gave the property to Esther? Because he was generous, felt guilty, or to make amends so she wouldn't be mad? What are your thoughts?
6. What did the king give to Mordecai in verse 2? Why do you think he did? (I wonder how he felt about being related to him by marriage....)
7. Haman's authority was now given to Mordecai, along with the management of Haman's estate. How do you think Haman's wife and his friends feel about this?
8. Esther pleads for her people in verses 3-6. How would you describe her appeal?
9. Haman used his personal influence for an evil and harmful purpose. Esther used her personal influence as well. When do you think it's right to use your personal influence to convince someone of something and when is it wrong? When is it manipulation?

10. Think about the way you choose to influence others personally. Can it be called manipulation? How can you make sure you use your influence in a Godly way?

Tomorrow we'll continue our chapter and see how the king reacts to Esther's request. For now, think about the influence you have on others. Are you influencing others for good? For God's agenda or your own?

Memory Verse of the Week: "Now Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, with a great crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple; and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad." Esther 8:15

Second Day

Work on your memory verse. Why is this verse so significant?

1. Read Esther 8:1-17 again. How did the king respond to Esther's request in verses 7-8? Why does it seem so extraordinary and amazing?
2. Explain the new decree from verses 11-12. How was it similar to the first decree? What stipulation was found in verse 11? Who was it sent to?
3. Do you think this decree caused fear in the enemies of the Jews? Do you think having a Jewish Queen and Prime Minister would increase any fear?

I want to end today with something I read and loved by Joseph Stowell from the Inspirational Study Bible. He wrote, "God's power to take the most negative situations and turn them into positive realities worthy of His praise is demonstrated throughout Biblical history. There is not a crisis that goes beyond the bounds of God's creative power. Whether the difficulties come from satan or other people, or are self-inflicted, or are experienced in the process of our obedience, it is the prerogative of God to rearrange, reconstruct, reinterpret, and realign the situation to bring glory and praise to His name ... Even Christ's death on the cross was transformed by the power of God into positive results and residual benefits of the redemption that many of us have come to know and enjoy. Since God is just, all that He permits is consistent with justice ... God's justice guarantees that ultimately all that is unfair will be dealt with. We are naïve to assume that all of life in its fallen condition is fair and just. It is only safe to realize that God is just and that in His time and in His own way He will deal with both the injustice and those who have been unjust."

9. Write your thoughts on the paragraph above... don't be afraid to be honest.

Third Day

Work on your memory verse.

I want to continue our discussion on justice for a bit. I was asked some questions that were very insightful during my own study, so I wanted to ask you them as well! These came from Max Lucado by the way, in case you were wondering!

1. Why is it so difficult to trust God when we are treated unfairly?

2. How can we remind ourselves of God's justice when we are surrounded by injustice?

3. In what area of your life do you need to wait patiently for justice to prevail?

4. Now from another angle. Read Micah 6:8. What does the Lord require of those who believe in Him? Do you treat others “justly” at all times? What can affect the amount of justice you show to others?

5. Ok, now read Esther 8:1-17 again. How did the people in Shushan respond when Mordecai came out in his royal apparel? How did the Jews respond when they heard about the new decree?

6. According to verse 17, what else happened?

A proselyte is a non-Jew who accepts the Jewish faith and completes the rituals to become a Jew. Concerning the statement in verse 17, that many became Jews, some think that those who converted couldn't be initiated fully into the faith because the Jews were far from Jerusalem and the ministry of the priests, so would be considered God-fearers. Others think that they simply weren't afraid of being identified with the Jews anymore. Shepherd wrote, “While these proselytes were reacting to the dramatic turn of events in Persia, others found the concept of one God creating, sustaining, and ruling all things to be superior to polytheistic views.”

7. Ok, time to move on! Please read Esther 9:1-11. Remember Haman had selected Adar as the month for this event (3:7). The thirteenth day was the appointed day for execution. What happened on the first day?

Remember that Mordecai's decree allowed the Jews to only retaliate against those who were attacking them, defending themselves. If no enemies attacked, the Jews would have killed no one.

8. According to 8:17 and 9:2, what other miracle did God do for the Jews?

9. There was a considerable amount of bloodshed, meaning that there were many enemies that still attacked God's people. Why do you think they still went after the Jews, even though they knew Mordecai and the Queen were Jewish?

10. According to verse 10, did the Jews plunder the enemies' goods? Did the decree give them permission to? (Also see verse 15 and 16) Why do you think they made this decision?

Tomorrow we'll look at a nasty word that describes what the Jews "could have" done but didn't. I'm sure it was pretty tempting, though!

Fourth Day

What's your memory verse?

1. Read Esther 9:12-16. Why do you think Esther wanted the sons of Haman hung on the gallows? Knowing her character, do you think she was being cruel or vindictive?

The Jews are careful not to make the same mistake King Saul made concerning the Amalekites, when he disobeyed God and kept the best of the plunder (1 Sam. 15:1-11). Raymond Dillard wrote, "The narrator is emphatic that the Jews did not take the plunder, in spite of the king's permission to do so (8:11). Seizing the plunder 500 years earlier in the battle against the Amalek had cost Saul the kingship (1 Sam. 15:17-19); here, not taking the plunder brings royal power to Mordecai (vs 20-23)." The Jews showed amazing restraint against those who hated them! They weren't after wealth, they only wanted to protect themselves.

The hanging of the corpses of Haman's sons was a public display, a warning and a battle tactic to scare the enemies and weaken their morale. Also, many scholars point out that Haman's strongest supporters, as well as his family members, were in Shushan, the capital city. Perhaps Esther wanted to make sure that none would survive and cause further trouble for her people.

The Jews were greatly outnumbered, and their victory was attributed to God alone! These Jewish men showed much faith and courage as they fought against the enemy.

2. How do you think the Jews kept their heart from desiring retaliation? (I'm not sure I could've.)

I think many of us have faced the temptation to go too far and stretch the limits of something, such as spending, eating, or even sleeping. We are tempted to go too far and walk too close to the line regarding our moral conduct as well. Webster defines retaliate as... "To repay (as an injury) in kind ... to return like for like ... to get revenge." The Jews were given permission to take plunder, as well as kill the women and children. But they didn't; they resisted. Swindoll wrote, "They pulled in the reins rather than let revenge run through the streets, wild and unrestrained. Human nature tends to do just the opposite. If the offender strikes, the offended strikes back. But if the cycle is ever to be broken, self-control must intervene and gain mastery over vengeance."

3. Do you tend to retaliate when you are offended or wronged? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you if that's a tendency of yours.

4. Right now, today, are you tempted to take matters into your hands in a situation you're facing? To either strike back or get even? Even when we have the "right" to retaliate, it doesn't mean we should. What do the following verses say about this?
 - a. Romans 12:17-21
 - b. 1 Peter 2:21-23
 - c. Isaiah 53:7
 - d. Proverbs 24:29
 - e. 1 Thess. 5:15

5. It's the way of the world to retaliate. What does Romans 12:2 say about this? How can your act of retaliation affect the entire body of Christ?

6. Who is ultimately your defender?

7. So ... what's the difference of retaliation and either confronting situations or even responding? Are we ever supposed to defend ourselves? Discuss your thoughts. Consider the things that play into this, such as motives, heart issues, etc. How do you know when to respond or defend yourself, your position, or another person? (Is it possible to get justice without getting even? Vindicate yourself without avenging your enemy? How?)

8. Have you ever shown restraint when retaliation may have been justified? Can you share about it?

9. How is Jesus a perfect example of denouncing retaliation? What can we learn from Him? Give Scriptures, if you can, to support your answer.

10. Is there someone who has hurt you that you can't forgive? Are you tempted to retaliate, either by using words or actions? How has the example of Esther and the Jews challenged you?

I pray that these discussion questions are challenging you to look higher, look deeper, look beyond, and love above! I know they are touching my heart!

Fifth Day**Write out your verse from memory!**

1. Let's continue reading chapter nine, beginning in verse 17 through 32. The Jews had a lot to celebrate! What holiday did Mordecai and Esther declare? List the reasons they were celebrating.

2. Why did they call it Purim? How did they celebrate it? How long is that custom supposed to continue?

This victory story was celebrated in an annual feast, recorded in two official letters, written in a journal, and recorded in our Bible!!! That's simply amazing!! I think God wanted it to be remembered ... wanted HIM to be remembered!

3. All through the Old Testament, the Jews were really good about remembering and celebrating victories. (Of course, they forgot even quicker, but that's another Bible study.) How good are you at remembering and celebrating the things God has done in your life? The prayers He has answered? The people He has healed? Make a list of all the things the Lord has done for you, prayers He has answered, etc., this very week. Then spend time giving God thanks and praise!

4. Purim is like a stone of remembrance. The holiday continues to remind them about how God delivered them. Do you think there is still value in setting up some type of “stone of remembrance” today to help you remember special things God has done in your life? What could they be, if not stones? Do you have any? What are some special occasions or situations that are important for you to remember?

5. In verse 30, Mordecai sent letters with words of “peace and truth.” Why do you think the message of peace was so important at that specific time? What kind of divisions could there have been?

6. While Haman was out for blood, Mordecai and Esther wanted peace for their people. Seeking peace was a big reason, I think, that the Jews were able to show restraint and not retaliate with vengeance. Ephesians 2:14 tells us that Jesus Christ is our peace, Who has broken down every wall. Paul said, “Be at peace among yourselves” (1 Thess. 5:13) and “pursue peace” (2 Tim. 2:22). Romans 12:14 tells us “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.” Are you a peacemaker or a peace “disrupter”? In what ways are we called to bring peace to this world? (Is peace “at all costs” Biblical?)

I love Psalm 37:37-38 in the NLT: “Look at those who are honest and good, for a wonderful future awaits those who love peace. But the rebellious will be destroyed, they have no future.” I hope the first line describes us!

The Feast of Purim is celebrated every year among the Jews. Swindoll describes the celebration like this, “An air of fun and festivity fills the synagogues as children come dressed as their favorite character from the story. When the book of Esther is read, everyone participates

by rattling noisemakers, booing, and stomping their feet every time Haman's name is mentioned and cheering the names of Esther and Mordecai. Throughout the day, messengers who are often disguised, deliver trays of food and delicious confections to neighbors and those in need. Instead of looking back with a heavy sigh or saddened heart, the Jews treat Purim as a time of fun and feasting and giving gifts."

7. The Jews turned their sadness into celebration. Do you tend to look back at certain events or issues with regret, disappointment, or even anger? The skeletons in our closets shouldn't haunt us forever, but are there to help us learn, understand, forgive, love, and trust and depend on God for healing. He uses them to shape us and conform us into the image of His Son. Is there something in your past that needs to be viewed differently now, moving you from sadness to celebration? Can you choose to look at the good that God has done rather than the mess?

8. Swindoll said, "Take one negative memory that has been haunting you and turn it into something positive. Out of the rubble of regret, build a monument of God's grace in your life. Describe the negative memory to God and ask Him to use it for good in your life. (Romans 8:28)" Can you do this?

Next week we will end our study of Esther with chapter ten, as well as review the lessons we learned from our lovely leading lady, Esther. I pray that the victory celebration we ended with will remind YOU how many victories God has given you in your life. It's so easy to focus on the defeats and forget all God has done! "This is the day which the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it!" (Psalm 118:24)

