

LESSON TEXT: Esther 1:1-22

Prepared by Paul T. Butler

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

Some 7000 psychologists jammed into Cincinnati for their annual convention. The University of Illinois famed researcher O. Hobart Mower declared: "We psychologists have largely followed the Freudian doctrine that human beings are too good." The patient "has within him impulses, especially those of lust and *hostility* which he has been unnecessarily inhibiting. And health, we tell him, is in recognizing and *expressing* these impulses...As a result, we have largely abandoned belief in right and wrong, virtue and sin," he concluded. God would call this man infamous!

Contrast that with this arresting statement by a candid college president a few years ago to a class of graduating seniors, "It gets easier and easier for man to dominate his universe...and harder and harder for him to dominate himself." He went on to say, "It matters little what you learn or express if in the end you cannot find some way of working things out with your neighbors." I will add, we cannot dominate the universe, but, with God's help, we can dominate ourselves.

Ahasuerus (a.k.a., Xerxes) is a classic example of a man who could not dominate himself. He held a drunken feast to show off before his underlings. The pompous show went on half a year; the drinking sprees lasting weeks. The emperor had an identity problem. He had a compulsion to prove his power. The Jewish Talmud is of the opinion that Xerxes, in a drunken stupor, called for his Queen, Vashti, to be brought into the banquet hall filled with 100's of inebriated men so her nakedness might be exposed to them all. It is a perverse and depraved sense of manhood that has to abuse and exploit women to create a macho image (Esther 1:19-22). This seems to be the only way Xerxes could find masculine security. And that is true of so many men today. But, maybe Vasti was in the wrong!

"Nothing dies harder than the desire to think well of self"
T. S. Eliot

QUESTIONS:

1. Should the book of Esther be in the Bible? The name of "God" is nowhere mentioned in Esther? What good is a book like this in our Bible?
2. Where does the Persian empire fit into the scheme of God's redemptive history? (see Dan. 2:31-49; 7:1-18; 8:1-27; read also Ezra & Nehemiah)
3. What kind of feast was being held? And why? 1:3,4 (Compare Daniel 5:1-30; Matt. 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29)
4. Why did Vashti refuse the emperor's demand? (Vashti means "beautiful woman") 1:10-11
5. Why should her refusal enrage Xerxes? (Hebrew word is *yud* meaning steaming, blazing). 1:12
6. Could Memucan have any reason (besides the one stated) for his suggestion? 1:16
7. Do you believe Memucan's prognosis (1:17-20) would have come to pass? Why?
8. Could Vashti have been disobeying her husband (who perhaps did not want her displayed naked) in order to rebel and show **her queenly** authority? We don't find Esther having any such difficulty with the same Xerxes. 1:19-22
9. Can you find at least five lessons of applications for godly-minded people in this first chapter?

"Pride is an admission of weakness; it secretly fears all competition and dreads all rivals."

**According to *The Law Officer* magazine, when "the mini-skirt was introduced by London designer Mary Quant in 1964, incidents of rape increased by 66% in the U.S. and by 90% in England."
It was a significant contributing cause of a frightening increase in sexual assault cases.**

LESSON TEXT: Esther 2:1-23

Prepared by Paul T. Butler

Greek legend says that when the Persians were pushing off from shore after being defeated at the battle of Marathon, Cynaegiros, brother of Aeschylus the Greek poet, seized one of their ships with his right hand, which was instantly lopped off; he then grasped it with his left, which was cut off also; lastly, he seized hold of it with his teeth and his head was severed. Thus were the Greeks afforded a legendary example that some are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of others. The Persians saw it, too.

A later generation of Persians would be privy to another, somewhat different, demonstration of self-sacrifice even more profound. A young, orphaned, but exquisitely beautiful Hebrew maiden named *Hadassah* would willingly sacrifice all her Jewish *kosherness* (i.e., ceremonial cleanness) and culture to be made Queen of Persia. *Hadassah* ("beautiful sweetness"). *Hadassah* was later named, *Esther* (means "star") was willing to become a part of Xerxes' harem (subjected to the indignity of being one of *many* of his wives), to go into his bedroom at night when summoned, be subjected to a beauty contest and eventually lay her life on the line in order to save her people from genocide.

Some might think becoming Queen would be really "neat," and not a sacrifice. Don't believe it! Think Jewish! Think about how different the cultures were. Think about the dangers involved--people jealous of your station wanting to kill you (Haman). Think about competing with a harem for your husband's affections.

Then, think, "what sacrifices am I willing to make for God's people?" Could I give up my present way of life, my comfort-zone--could I face danger--could I give up an hour or two to sustain the kingdom of God? Think of Esther and be thankful.

Sacrifice is only that which is given after the heart has given all that it can spare. To sacrifice for Christ's sake brings joy unbounded and peace unmoved by the fleeting things of this life

QUESTIONS

1. Why did Xerxes *remember* Vashti? 2:1
2. Why would his servants suggest he select a new queen from young maidens not presently in his harem? 2:1-4
3. What does Mordecai's adoption of *Hadassah (Esther)* say about Mordecai's character? 2:5-8
4. Should Esther have kept her Jewish lineage a secret? 2:10 Was that ethical?
5. What was Esther doing staying the night in the king's royal palace? Was that ethical? 2:12-14
6. Why didn't Esther accept all the preparation of the harem before going in to the king's presence? 2:15
7. What do you think made Esther the king's choice? Why name a feast for her? 2:17
8. Why would Mordecai care that some Persians were plotting to kill their own heathen king? 2:21-22.
9. Why did the king make a record in his royal chronicles of the execution of two assassins? 2:23

"Tyranny and anarchy are alike incompatible with freedom, security, and the enjoyment of opportunity."

--Jeane J. Kirkpatrick, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations.

"Some boast of being friends to government; I am a friend to righteous government, to a government founded upon the principles of reason and justice; but I glory in publicly showing my eternal enmity to tyranny."

----John Hancock, March 5, 1774

"We can offer up much in the large, but to make sacrifice in the little things is what we are seldom equal to."

---Goethe

LESSON TEXT: Esther 3:1-15

Prepared by Paul T. Butler

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

Harold Stassen, the man who always wanted to be President but could never get the nomination, said: "Whoever kindles the flames of intolerance...is lighting a fire underneath his own home." That is precisely what happened to *Haman* (whose name in Hebrew, means "violent one"). When he incited genocide against the Jews it eventuated in his own ignominious death.

But all of mankind's guilt for bigotry and persecution cannot be laid exclusively at the feet of unbelievers and pagans. Some who have professed belief in the One, True, God, have, in the name of their belief--including Jews, Moslems and Christians--shared in that human perversion. Why are people intolerant of one another? Why the historical ambiguity of both believers and unbelievers indulging in racial or class oppression? Is race, skin color, cultural difference or genre actually the cause of intolerance? NO!

The *cause* goes deeper than the skin. Its root is **pride!** The philosopher, Santayana, said: "The passions grafted on wounded pride are the most inveterate." *Wounded pride* smoldering in the heart of Haman, fueled by Mordecai's refusal to dishonor God, produced an explosion of promised violence that would have exterminated a whole race of people. **Wounded pride** drove Pharaoh to persecute the Israelites. Hitler blamed the Jews for the humiliation of Germany and tried to kill them all. Medieval Catholicism's jealousy for its prestigious control of civilization produced the Inquisitions. The Puritanical pogroms in colonial New England against Roger Williams were born of an overreaching power struggle and pride in orthodoxy.

Pride trapped an angel who became the devil; pride seduced the first human beings to disobey God; pride produced the first murder; pride crucified Christ! The single most important thing that can result from becoming a Christian is the **destruction** of pride! A person is never really saved until he admits (and constantly repeats) that his acceptance by God is totally, utterly absolutely due to God's grace. "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty" (Luke 17:7-10). No human being has a right to boast in the presence of God (1 Cor. 1:26-31).

QUESTIONS:

1. Why didn't Mordecai bow down to Haman? Is it wrong to show deference to human beings in places of leadership? To what extent? Why? 3:1-2
2. Was it right for the king's servants to "snitch" on Mordecai for breaking the royal edict? Should we report our neighbors for breaking laws? Which laws? When? How do you decide? 3:3-4
3. Why did Haman want to destroy **all** the Jews for just **one** Jew's behavior? Do all Americans--Caucasians, Blacks, Orientals, Hispanics and Arabs behave alike? 3:5-6
4. How many Jews were scattered among the Persians? What Jewish laws were different than Persian laws? What difference did the *difference* make? 3:7
5. Did the Jews really not keep Persian laws? (see Jer. 29:4-9). Is lawbreaking unprofitable? 3:8
6. What additional bait did Haman hold out to the king to get approval for his genocide? Does money ever take precedence over truth? Over life? 3:9-10
7. How could this king who had a Jewish woman as his queen approve such barbarity? 3:12-14
8. How can human beings become so depraved they can order the brutal slaying of men, women and children, and then sit down and celebrate it? Rom. 1:18-32. Is any human being capable of that--or only certain ones? Wouldn't a redistribution of wealth so that every one had the same amount of money cure such depravity? 3:15

"Vain-glorious men are the scorn of the wise, the admiration of fools... and the slaves of their own vaunts." ----Francis Bacon

"Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is in an organized conspiracy to oppress, rob, and degrade them neither persons nor property will be safe."

--Frederick Douglass, at 24th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation,
Washington D. C. April 1886

LESSON TEXT: Esther 4:1-17

Prepared by Paul T. Butler

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

“Letters were sent by couriers to all the king’s provinces, to destroy, to slay, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, men, women and children.” Essentially, this is what Mordecai wrote in a message to Queen Esther. He would continue, “And if the death sentence is pronounced upon all Jews, you and I, Esther, will be included!” So, Esther, that’s the bottom line!

It was a time for unparalleled heroism and daring. Someone from the Jewish exiles had to find a way to rescind this genocidal edict of Xerxes. Remember, once a Persian king made a law it could not be revoked. A different situation would have to be presented to the king that would result in an edict which would supercede the one just made. It would call for wisdom, ingenuity and most of all, courage.

Henry Ward Beecher said, “The world’s battlefields have been in the heart chiefly; more heroism has been displayed in the household...than on the most memorable battlefields in history.” And, everyone knows the old adage, “Heroes are made, not born!”

In an article in the Joplin, MO, *Globe*, 2-5-90, an American-culture expert observed that “most modern Americans choose their heroes (and heroines) from today’s media-hyped celebrities whose lives are almost totally *devoid* of any substance. Most modern heroes are exorbitantly rich, sensually indulgent, petulantly self-centered, and practically illiterate. They are idols and symbols of a flesh-crazed society.” What about Esther (*Hadassah*)? Here was a beautiful young woman who, if she didn’t rock any boats, was set for life. She could live a life of luxury and grandeur if she left all substance out of her life, took no stand and only looked out for *numero uno* (herself). BUT ESTHER WAS NOT THAT KIND OF PERSON. She took a stand! She was ready to lay her life on the line for goodness--for TRUTH. That is why she is one of history’s greatest heroines!

“God is preparing His heroes, and when the opportunity comes, he can fit them into their places in a moment and the world will wonder where they came from.” —A. B. Simpson

QUESTIONS:

1. What is sackcloth? Why put it on? Would such behavior be acceptable today? 4:1-3
2. Why didn’t Mordecai put on the garments sent to him by Queen Esther? 4:4
3. How could Esther trust this Persian eunuch named Hathach? 4:5
4. What was Esther’s first response to Mordecai’s directions? 4:10-11 Why? What would you have replied to Mordecai?
5. What did Mordecai present first to Esther to motivate her to supplicate the king? 4:13 Is that too base a motive? What motivates you?
6. Do you believe, with Mordecai, that if Esther had not acted for deliverance, someone else would? 4:14
7. How do people come to the kingdom for such a time as this? 4:14 Does history work like this? Are there always people appearing at strategic moments in history to do God’s work? Think back!
8. Is Esther’s statement, “...and if I perish, I perish” fatalism or faith? What’s the difference? 4:15-16

“The essence of greatness is in the perception that virtue is enough.”

--Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1841

“Surely one of the most daring of all adventurers was Christopher Columbus. He was sailing where no man had ever sailed before. His crew urged him to turn back. They threatened mutiny if he did not. Still Columbus stayed his course. We must have the same courage

to set a goal and then stay our course, no matter what others may think, say, or do.”

--1000 Windows, by Robert C. Shannon

LESSON TEXT: Esther 5:1-14

Prepared by Paul T. Butler

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

Women as presidents or vice-presidents is still an unresolved proposition in today's America. Women in military combat--under fire or commanding troops under fire--must be given even more cautious consideration! Here in the United States we have women senators, representatives, ambassadors, high ranking military officers, governors, and mayors. Some good, some bad, just like the male-leadership spectrum. This does not even take into account all the female business executives, professional leaders, and artists with which our culture is blessed.

And we should not be surprised. It has been always thus--according to Biblical history! Here, in the book of Esther is a woman who is a shrewd political leader. She recognized just how crucial the moment was, knew she alone could bring a safe resolution to the matter, knew the surest procedure to pursue, and had the daring to pursue it. Mordecai's program was only intensifying the agitation of Haman to kill all the Jews. Had Mordecai tried to gain an audience with the king he probably would have blustered, berated, and blundered into getting himself executed.

Esther was an expert practitioner of patience, flattery, and conviviality. She knew how to get a king's attention without provoking his aggressiveness. Like all lasses with long lashes, she could twist a man around her finger and make him enjoy it. She even bamboozled a man into building a gallows upon which he, himself, would be hanged!

It would not seem prudent to place women in positions that they would have to commit our country's military to war or command troops in war or be in combat themselves. But never, never, underestimate the power of a woman! English Prime-Minister Margaret Thatcher was not called the "Iron Lady" for nothing. You don't suppose, do you, that in this man's world of male-chauvinists and machos we could benefit by more female courage and finesse in high places of political leadership and diplomacy! It all depends on the **character** of the woman aspiring to leadership! Leadership in the church of Christ is another matter!

QUESTIONS:

1. What did Esther do to get the king's attention? Why didn't she just wait for God to work a miracle to deliver the Jews? 5:1-2
2. Was Esther's dressing-up and her invitation to dinner manipulative? 5:1-2 Is it right to manipulate people if a good purpose is sought?
3. Do you think Esther was tempted to take half the kingdom? 5:3 How do you think you would have reacted in Esther's place?
4. 4. Since Esther's mission was extremely urgent, why did she invite the king and Haman to a second dinner? 5:4-8
5. 5. Upon what did Haman depend for his self-esteem? 5:9-12 Is it essential for a person to have self-esteem? What are people worth? Why? Who's to blame if we don't have self-worth?
6. 6. Haman seemed to have it all--riches, family, position, fame, position, and favor of the powerful--but he was not content; what in the world brings contentment? 5:13
7. 7. How does one get rid of that which stands in the way of contentment? How does one circumvent the harsh realities of being ignored, spurned, unloved? Kill someone? Rob, destroy, space-out on drugs or alcohol? 5:14
8. 8. Is happiness controlled by circumstances or by *perspective*? Why?

"Being a woman is a terribly difficult task since it consists principally in dealing with men."
--Joseph Conrad

"Woman's great mission is to train immature, weak, and ignorant creatures to obey the laws of God."
--Catherine Esther Beecher

LESSON TEXT: Esther 6:1-14

Prepared by Paul T. Butler

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

Haman was like the guy who loved himself so much he sent his parents a telegram of congratulations on HIS birthday! If Haman were alive today he'd never watch TV because it would take his mind off himself! Haman always envied his new acquaintances--imagine meeting someone great like him! He undoubtedly had a mirror on his bathroom ceiling so he could watch himself gargle!

William Penn said: "To be a man's own fool is bad enough; but the vain man is everybody's fool!" Yes, Haman had that most pervasive but subtle sickness we call egotism. His conceit made him oblivious to everything and everybody but himself. He was so intent on being the center of attraction if he had gone to a funeral he would probably be sorry he wasn't the corpse. If anyone wasn't talking about him, he wasn't listening. So when King Xerxes indicated he wanted to honor someone, Haman *the narcissist* assumed *Haman* was about to be honored. Who else?!!!

Solomon, who had much more to be egotistical about than Haman, said: "When pride comes, then comes disgrace; but with the humble is wisdom" Prov. 11:2 (see also Prov. 13:10; 16:18; 18:12; 29:23). The NT unequivocally cautions against conceit. It advises that if we use sober judgment we will not think more highly of ourselves than we ought (Rom. 12:3). We are warned against being haughty or conceited (Rom. 12:16). We are expected to do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility to always count others better than ourselves (Phil. 2:3).

But the world keeps up its verbal abuse that fundamental Biblical Christianity stands for bigoted, arrogant, holier-than-thou attitudes. Some of us who profess Christ may be like that, but it isn't what the Bible teaches! What a contrast between a man like Haman and one like, for example, George Washington Carver!

"A proud man is seldom a grateful man, for he never thinks he gets as much as he deserves"----Henry Ward Beecher

QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you suppose the king couldn't sleep that night? 6:1 What impact on the deliverance of the Jews did the king's insomnia have?
2. Is it government's business to honor and reward those who do good? 6:2-3 (see Rom. 13:3-4; 1 Pet. 2:14). How's our government doing on this?
3. What would have happened had Haman spoken first of his desire to have Mordecai hanged? 6:4-6 Does this teach us anything about controlling the tongue?
4. Is Haman's reply to the king normal? Human? Why? 6:7-9 How can God expect human beings to think and react differently?
5. Is there anything wrong with honoring a truly deserving person to the extent Haman recommended? 6:7-9. When might it be proper? Is it dangerous? Dangerous to omit it? see Romans 13:7
6. Can you empathize with Haman when he heard the order of the king? 6:7-9. Did Haman's compliance show that he was an honorable man of good will even when losing? 6:10-11
7. Why did Haman's wife and friends change their advice (see Esth. 5:14) to Haman? 6:12-13
8. Why didn't Haman now excuse himself from the Queen's soiree? 6:14

One of the best temporary cures for pride and affectation is seasickness; a man who wants to vomit never puts on airs!----Mark Twain

Mark Twain's Ego Gets Punctured!

Mark Twain was a distinguished-looking figure in his later years. One day he was strolling in the park when a little girl came up to him and asked if she might walk with him. Highly flattered, Twain told her stories for an hour, then gave her a nickel and said, "Now run along home--and when you grow up you can tell your friends you once walked with Mark Twain." "Mark Twain," echoed the little girl, bursting into tears, "I thought you were Buffalo Bill."

LESSON TEXT: Esther 7:1-10

Prepared by Paul T. Butler

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

The editor of *American Opinion* quoted a statement someone said should be the epitaph of our modern society: "This civilization died because it didn't want to be bothered!" Dr. Laurence M. Gould, president emeritus of Carleton College said: "I do not believe the greatest threat to our future is from bombs or guided missiles. I don't think our civilization will end that way. I think it will die when we no longer care." Arnold Toynbee, revered historian, has pointed out that 19 of 21 civilizations have died from within and not by conquest. "There were no bands playing or flags waving when these civilizations decayed. It happened slowly, in the quiet and in the dark when no one was aware."

Esther would not let her whole nation be eradicated. She would not keep quiet. There was a clear and certain reason for her to expect to lose her own life by disagreeing with the king's edict and accusing the king's prime-minister. Yet she willingly faced the danger and exposed the evil. There is a time to keep silent, BUT THERE IS ALSO A TIME TO SPEAK (Eccl. 3:7). All that is necessary for evil to rule the world is for good people to do nothing. That was the case in Persia. That is the case today in America! *Indifference* to evil is *more* insidious than evil itself; it is *more* universal, *more* contagious, and *more* perilous.

Dr. John A. Howard, president of Rockford College said: "I invite you to take a little card and put it on your mirror or display it in some prominent place where it can serve as a daily reminder. I suggest that you inscribe on that card this phrase:--**Truth is outraged by silence.**"

Christians cannot be silent about evil wherever it may be--they have an apostolic order... "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead **expose** them." (Eph 5:11). The Greek word *elegchete* of Eph. 5:11 means to "put on trial and convict by confutation." IF SOMETHING'S WRONG, CHRISTIAN, YOU NEED TO SAY SO!

Evil does not disappear merely by being ignored!

QUESTIONS:

1. How did Esther phrase her request wisely? 7:1-4 But why should she even speak up?
2. What must Esther reveal to the king for the first time by her request? 7:4
3. How would the king lose if the Jews were eradicated as Haman wished? 7:4
4. Did Esther have to name names? 7:6 Isn't that judging? Let the king find out by himself who is threatening his queen!
5. What did Haman intend by falling on Esther's couch? 7:7-8 How did the king evaluate Haman's actions? Should Haman be innocent by reason of entrapment?
6. Now the shoe is on the other's foot! Does it give you a sense of justice to know that Haman is going to get his? Should it?
7. Why do you think Harbona reminded the king of Haman's gallows? 7:9
8. Wait a minute--where is Haman's trial by a jury of his peers? How can Jews like Mordecai and Esther accept official positions in a political structure that hangs people before a trail? 7:10

"It is when we all play safe that we create a world of utmost insecurity."

--Dag Hammarskjold, former Secretary General of the U.N.

Justice is the end (i.e., basis) of government.

It is the end (basis) of civil society.

It ever has been and ever will be pursued until it be obtained, or until liberty be lost in the pursuit.

--James Madison

LESSON TEXT: Esther 8:1-17

Prepared by Paul T. Butler

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

“Down with the government!” “Power to the people!” “Burn, baby, burn!” Nihilists and anarchists believe in no government. They believe mankind needs no structure in society of any kind--that people should be free of all imposed restraints. We heard some of this in America in the decades 1960's & 70's. We are hearing it even today!

But human government, flawed as it may be, **is ordained of God** (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17, etc.) and is **indispensable**. Human governments may be relatively good or bad, depending on the character of those officials to whom government is entrusted. **BUT EVEN BAD GOVERNMENT IS BETTER THAN NO GOVERNMENT AT ALL!** We are seeing it demonstrated before our eyes on our TV screens in those emerging democracies of eastern Europe and Africa and today! We are also seeing it in the streets of American cities! **Total** democracy--power relegated to every individual is nothing more than mobocracy and when that happens, nothing is secure, not life, liberty or property. Study the French Revolution in the 18th century.

Esther and Mordecai and the Jews learned that even being exiled under a foreign rule was better than no government at all. Corrupt and pagan as the Persian government was, it became the one instrument through which the Jewish race could be saved. Even those expensive, frivolous trappings of government (e.g., the Persian royal indulgences) which sometimes exasperate tax-payers, may often be of very crucial usefulness.

Under Persian government, common citizens did not vote, had no freedom of the press, suffered racial, sexual, social discriminations of all kinds, were heavily taxed for the use of an indulgent government--had no labor unions or social securities. But there was law and order and certain fundamental human protections. And, isn't it interesting, that God's word authorizes no nihilistic, anarchistic revolutions against government--God, in fact, ordered the Jews to pray for the Persian government (Jer. 29:7; see 1 Tim. 2:-4 Timothy's government was the Roman empire!). **THANK GOD FOR AMERICA!**

QUESTIONS:

1. Would it bother you to receive an appointment to serve as an official of a pagan government? 8:1-2 How would you reconcile your Christian convictions with what that government did? See the book of Daniel
2. Could the laws of the Persians be revoked 8:5? If not, what could be done? Does America have any bad laws? Should we rewrite our Constitution?
3. Could you handle the power given to Esther and Mordecai 8:8? What about America's government leaders--are their powers unlimited? What are we to do?
4. Suddenly the king's stables became very useful 8:10--do you have complaints about some apparently frivolous non-necessities in our government? What?
5. Is self-defense an “Unalienable” human right? Should Americans have the right to keep guns in their homes? For what? What does the Bible say? 8:11-14
6. Why didn't the Lord just work a miracle and deliver the Jews from Haman's edict? 8:11-14 May we expect God to provide justice in all circumstances? Does God want men to execute justice in this world? How do you know?
7. Why did many Persians declare themselves Jews 8:17? What implications may this have for determining who are Jews today?
- 8.

“Law is the cement of civilization....
Law is the alternative to
tyranny on one hand and anarchy on the other.”
--Thomas Lambert

“Public officers are the servants and agents of the people,
to execute laws which the people have made
and within the limits of a constitution they have established
Good government has for its object the protection of every person
within its care in the greatest liberty consistent with the good
order of society, and his perfect security in the enjoyment of his
earnings with the least possible diminution for public needs.”
--Grover Cleveland, 1886.U.S. President

LESSON TEXT: Esther 9:1---10:3

Prepared by Paul T. Butler

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

The Feast of Purim (9:16-32) is not ordained in the Torah (law of Moses). But it has been a regular celebration of Judaism ever since the days of Esther and Mordecai. It is usually celebrated in the month of March.

“The main feature of Purim is the unique chanting of the entire scroll of Esther both evening and morning. The 4 verses of redemption (2:5; 8:15-16; 10:3) are read in a louder voice than the other verses. Children are provided with whirling noisemakers called *gragers* and every time the name of the villain, Haman, is mentioned, the *gragers* are whirled and those present stamp their feet, boo, and hiss to drown out the hated name of this enemy of the Jews. A triangular cookie filled with prune-jam called *Oznei Haman* (“Haman’s Ears”) is eaten. At some celebrations an effigy of Haman is burned. When the name of Esther or Mordecai is mentioned everyone cheers. Jews send gifts of pastries to their friends and neighbors on Purim. Purim is the one day in the year when drunkenness is raised to the level of a *mitzvah* (commandment). There is a Jewish saying that only when one is so drunk that one cannot distinguish in the service between the names of Mordecai and Haman has one fulfilled the observance of Purim. The children dress up in masquerade costumes and go from house to house begging gifts and even money. A special meal is eaten on Purim evening of boiled beans and peas. Men dress in women’s clothing and women dress in men’s clothing (which contradicts the law of Moses, ptb). Among the masses it has become almost a general rule that on Purim everything is allowed. It has been compared with the carnival of Mardi Gras in New Orleans! There is a Jewish proverb that says when Messiah comes all holidays will be abolished--except Purim!” (see *Living Jewish*, by Michael Asheri, pub. Everest House, pp. 177-178).

What was intended as a very spiritual festival by Esther’s people has been turned into adult drunkenness! Believers should be careful about instituting religious observances where the revealed word of God (the Bible) has not instituted them (see Rom. 14:1-23).

QUESTIONS:

1. Did the Jews go too far in executing justice upon their enemies 9:5ff? 75,000 in one day? Has the principle of justice evolved to a higher ethical plane today. Methods of executing justice? Should they?
2. Why didn’t the Jews take the property of their vanquished enemies? 9:10,15,16. They were given permission to do so (8:11) They did in Egypt!
3. Why execute the *sons* of Haman? How could Esther, a woman, be so cold-blooded? 9:13
4. Is it right to celebrate a day of such gruesome carnage with gladness, feasting (Heb. *Mishetteh*, drinking-bouts) and holiday-making? 9:20-22
5. What would “Pur” have to do with Purim? 9:26 (see Esth. 3:7).
6. Can you see the Messiah (Jesus) observing Purim? Did Jesus ever attend Purim while he was on earth? He *did* attend one Jewish feast not legislated in the law of Moses--know which one it was? John 10:22
7. How great was the power of Mordecai? 10:1-3 Why was he called great among the Jews?

“If sensuality were happiness, beasts were happier than men; but human felicity is lodged in the soul, not in the flesh.”
---Seneca, Roman statesman and philosopher

“Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice. Justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love.”
----Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Men and nations must use their power with the purpose of making it an instrument of justice and a servant of interest broader than their own.”----Reinhold Neibuhr