

## Grace Group Guide

### Book of Esther – Final Thoughts

There have been some tremendous highs and lows in this book and while I was very enthusiastic about it at the start, the farther we went the more I began to see why the great reformer Martin Luther said that he wished the book of Esther had never made it into the cannon of scripture. John Calvin never wrote commentary on it, nor did he ever preach from it. In fact, during the first seven centuries of the Christian church, NO ONE wrote any commentaries on it. I'm glad that I'm not the only one that has struggled with this book. Despite the overwhelming picture of God's providential hand around every turn, we are still left with the question – what are we to do with Mordecai and Esther?

I received a lot of good feedback last week regarding your thoughts on that very question, but I still struggle with it. I think Dr. Thomas Constable described well my feelings when he said:

*"Without question Mordecai was a man of great ability and admirable character. He also demonstrated faith in the Abrahamic Covenant and in God's providential care of His people (4:13-14). Esther, too, showed some dependence on God for His help (4:16). However, these qualities characterized many Jews who, Jesus Christ in His day said, were not pleasing to God (Matt. 3:9; 6:16; John 8:39).*

*Mordecai and Esther, it seems, were eager to preserve their nation and their religion, but they give little evidence of desire to do God's will personally. In this respect they contrast with Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. No one forced Esther into Ahasuerus' harem. She evidently ate unclean food for months (2:9; Dan. 1:5, 8). Furthermore, the king did not know she was a Jewess for five years (2:16; 3:7). "For the masquerade to last that long, she must have done more than eat, dress and live like a Persian. She must have worshipped like one!" We cannot excuse her behavior on the ground that she was simply obeying Mordecai's orders (2:20). Her conduct implicates him in her actions."*

Another commentator, Paul Ferguson put it this way: *"We also see the painful consequence of compromise in this story. Esther and Mordecai are far from heroes of the faith in many aspects of their lives. They set the wrong example in many areas. Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel give much better patterns to emulate. **However, God uses imperfect people. (Amen!)** That does not excuse their imperfections, but it gives us all hope. Too often we lionize the men and women of Scripture forgetting it begins in grace, is sustained by grace, and is perfected in grace in every life.*

*Esther and Mordecai grew through their circumstances. For instance, she was a timid, compromised young woman at the beginning but emerges a woman of courage, wisdom, tact, and sacrifice. This is a great story because its great focus is about a great God. He gets all the glory in the deliverance of His people in this book. The story is truly of the greatness of God and a warning about being too impressed with the greatness of men. The amazing preservation of God of His chosen people throughout the centuries is truly a testimony to His Sovereign wisdom and power."*

In the end of this account, it looks like a wonderful victory for the folks in the Persian provinces. 75,000 of the enemy killed compared to zero (we are led to assume) for the Jews. That's a whopping victory if I've ever seen one! Yet I wonder, how far reaching was this victory that they had? What was the victory that they experienced like when compared to the battles won by the remnant as described in Ezra and Nehemiah?

**Does the Christian life have varying degrees of victory? What examples can you think of?**

Ferguson goes on to give a very helpful summation of the humans understanding of providence: "God

*brings triumph out of seemingly tragedy. Our faith is edified as we see God working through and in control of the mundane events of Esther and Mordecai's lives. The immortal, invisible, all-wise hand of God is always working behind the scenes of our lives, hidden from human eyes. This beautiful message should give us great peace that God is in control of ours also. Despite the obstacles He always has His way. In our crises of life, we can sometimes imagine that He is distant or unconcerned when He is working quietly to preserve His people and His Words all along. Like the many cogs in a complex piece of engineering, we cannot understand the many wheels of providence He is turning at the same moment of time to accomplish what He wants. Man is not competent to discern such a God who can multiply the wisdom and goodness of providence in such harmony.*

*Too often we misjudge providence. We look down our spiritual noses because we do not see thunder and lightning but that does not mean His work is any more effective. Yes, God has used mighty miracles and armies to accomplish His purposes. But He is not limited to those strategies. It takes eyes of faith to see and discern His working in the shadows also keeping watch over us, "for we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). We often see links in the chain but only God can see the end from the beginning. As one writer put it, Like Joseph, we may ultimately understand in this life why God allows events to transpire as they do (Genesis 50:20). Or like many Old Testament saints, we may never be able to put the puzzle together this side of heaven (Hebrews 11:35-40). But that's okay. We are not the tapestry-makers. God is."*

#### **"Life is but a Weaving" by Corrie Ten Boom**

    "My life is but a weaving  
    Between my God and me.  
    I cannot choose the colors  
    He weaveth steadily.  
Oft' times He weaveth sorrow;  
    And I in foolish pride  
    Forget He sees the upper  
    And I the underside.  
    Not 'til the loom is silent  
    And the shuttles cease to fly  
    Will God unroll the canvas  
    And reveal the reason why.  
The dark threads are as needful  
    In the weaver's skillful hand  
As the threads of gold and silver  
    In the pattern He has planned  
    He knows, He loves, He cares;  
    Nothing this truth can dim.  
He gives the very best to those  
    Who leave the choice to Him."