

ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

The Limitations of Retaliation

Esther 9:1–16

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

To slap when we've been slapped, to trick when we've been tricked, or to mock when we've been mocked—no one needs any training to return like for like. The impulse to strike back settles in all of us from childhood through old age. But no matter how strong the urge to retaliate grips us, we don't have to let it steer us.

God's Spirit grants us the fruit of self-control that we all might rein in our temptation to retaliate. Even though retaliation promises sweet satisfaction, no one ever regretted choosing self-control once tasting the honey its peace provides.

Today, we'll study with Chuck Swindoll Esther 9:1–16 and explore the limits of retaliation and the benefits of exercising self-control.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

If you already feel like you're sinking in spiritual waters at the mere mention of *self-control*, take a deep breath and repeat after Paul, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7).

God has equipped you through His Spirit and with His wisdom to do all He would have you do. That includes living with the spiritual fruit of self-control.

Before we employ Chuck Swindoll's four-step Bible study method—observation, interpretation, correlation, and application—let's pray.

Father, thank You for giving us power, love, and self-discipline through Your Spirit. All these are gifts because of the work of Your Son. I realize that self-control is a fruit of the Spirit because no amount of my own energy can restrain my urge to retaliate. Through this study, help me lay down my will and embrace Yours because it is better—in every way it is better. In Jesus' name, amen.

Quotable

Don't take your cues from what the world will do because it will invariably retaliate with vengeance.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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Observation

Fast-forward from the dispersing of Ahasuerus' edicts to the climactic thirteenth day of Adar—March 7 in the NLT. It's the day Haman authorized the Persians, with the king's blind approval, to annihilate and plunder the Jews. It's also the day Mordecai later authorized the Jews, with the king's delighted awareness, to defend, even avenge, themselves against their attackers.

The author examines three core events in *Esther 9:1–16*. Take a moment now to read the passage slowly.

Esther 9:1–4

In Esther 9:1–4 what significant details do you observe?

You'll notice the author not only recorded the events that happened but interpreted them for the reader as well. Below, write how the author imported the theological meaning of these events.

Esther 9:5–14

Now observe Esther 9:5–14 and record any important details you discover.



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What were Esther's two requests of the king?

1. _____

2. _____

Esther 9:15–16

Lastly, examine Esther 9:15–16, and record your observations below.

Remember, biblical authors sometimes repeated themselves to emphasize their points. What did the author repeat in this section?

Now that we've observed Esther 9:1–16, let's interpret it.



Interpretation

Observation is like walking through a colorful garden, noticing all the petunias and roses, the elephant ears and ivies. We take it all in, noticing as much as we can. Then, during interpretation, we begin to notice the planting patterns the gardener used to pair flowers, the path he intended us to take through the garden, and the color schemes he established in the grand design.



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Power and the Powerful—Esther 9:1–4

How did the author explain the use and transfer of power in this section?

Throughout the entire book of Esther, the author never mentioned Mordecai's piety or devotion to God. Do you believe Mordecai was a pious man devoted to God, or do you believe the public officials viewed him as a harsh man? Why? Really think about this, and determine how your conclusion influences your understanding of God in His use of Mordecai.

In a foreign land with idol worshipers, Yahweh gave Jews the upper hand against their enemies. God, not government, always has the final say—even if it seems the government consistently perverts justice.

The Outcome of Haman's Family and Followers—Esther 9:5–14

Whether defending Haman's honor or lusting after silver, groups attacked the Jews despite the second edict. In this paragraph, how did the author suggest God's involvement?



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With Haman impaled and his property confiscated, the Jews enacted a final humiliation against this anti-Semite: his sons were killed—probably to ward off a coup against Esther, Mordecai, or any official. Based on Esther’s first request of the king (Esther 9:13), why did she ask for Haman’s sons to hang like Haman?

God ensured the Jews were protected and their enemies defeated.

Esther 9:15–16

The author emphasized the Jews’ newfound safety, then he expressed their newfound victory. Note how many were killed. Remember that Esther’s request for the following day paralleled the terms of the first—the Jews killed only those who attacked them, not those they disliked (*Esther 8:11–12*). What in this passage reveals the Jews’ remarkable self-control?



Correlation

Sandwiched between the two statements about the Jews not taking plunder lies an easily overlooked Hebrew phrase that carries loads of meaning. The author wrote that the Jews “gained relief from all their enemies” (Esther 9:16) or gained “rest from their enemies” (9:16 *NASB*; see translation endnote). This statement emphasizes God’s promise to give the Jews *rest* from their enemies (sometimes translated *relief* in the NLT). Below we will examine a few verses that develop this major biblical theme.



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Record what the following verses say about *rest*.

Deuteronomy 3:20; 12:9–10

Deuteronomy 25:19 (Don't miss the reference to Amalek, the ancestor of Agag, who is in the lineage of Haman—*Esther 3:1*); *Joshua 1:13–15*

2 Samuel 7:1–11; 1 Kings 8:56

Alas, the great King Solomon could not retain the rest God granted him and his people. Solomon pursued other gods. Therefore, God raised up prophets to bring the wayward Israelites back to Himself. Review these two passages in Isaiah in which God promised a future rest for His people.

Isaiah 11:10; 32:17–18 (NASB)



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After developing a quick historical overview of God's promise of rest to His people, it gives new theological meaning to the Lord's adored offer: "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

Can you now see more clearly the theological significance of *rest* used by the author of Esther in 9:16? In Esther, *rest* means to be undisturbed by enemies. In other words, the term means to be free to enjoy our work—our God-given purpose—in the same way God did when He "rested on the seventh day" of creation (Genesis 2:1–3). *Rest* doesn't mean inaction but performing the *right* action—doing what God made us to do. Further in the biblical narrative, *rest* takes on a deeper meaning: an inward peace from God because of our relationship with Him—the chief reason for which God made us.

Application

To exercise the kind of self-control displayed by the Jews and promised by the Spirit, we must enjoy a profound, supernatural rest in Christ. We would grow weary if we tried to avenge ourselves of every snub. Chuck's three principles help us move spiritually toward this rest in Jesus, so we can refrain from the bitter root of retaliation.

1. *Remember, you are a Christian, which means you are different from the world.* God has given you resources unavailable anywhere else. Enjoy His presence, comfort, and peace.
2. *Remember, as a Christian, you are a part of a family.* You are a child of God. We take our direction from His grace rather than retaliatory instincts.
3. *Remember, the Lord is your defender.*

Never pay back evil with more evil. . . . Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the LORD. . . . Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good. (Romans 12:17–19, 21)

Do you want to retaliate? If so, consider speaking with the person antagonizing you and pursuing peace with him or her. Before you do, however, prepare how you will address the situation, and pray for the Lord's blessing on your efforts of reconciliation. Record your plan and desired outcome below.



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Do you know of a relationship in conflict right now that is failing because of constant retaliation? Record your prayer for those people.

God's Spirit can quiet the unsettled soul from the deep desire to retaliate. How unfathomable was Jesus' cry from His cross, "Forgive them" (Luke 23:34). How remarkable! He has the power that can make reconciliation possible, and He will extend that power to the one who asks because He is good.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for peace that conquers conflict and for joy that expels anger. Christ has purchased for me all the riches I could ever want, so please fix my mind on who I am in Him and the hope I have in Him. Satisfy me with Your presence so I may exercise supernatural self-control that forgives rather than retaliates. I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.



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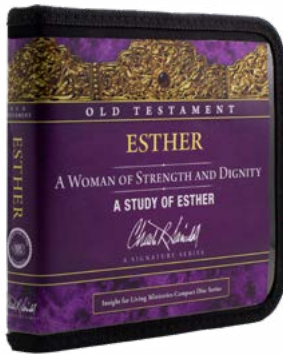
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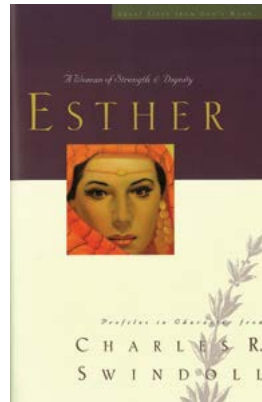
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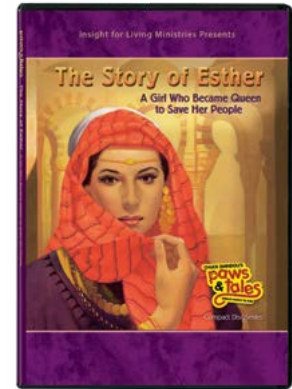
Tools for Digging Deeper



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For the 2018 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Aaron Massey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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