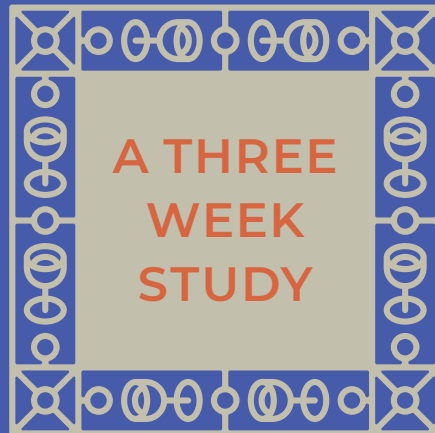
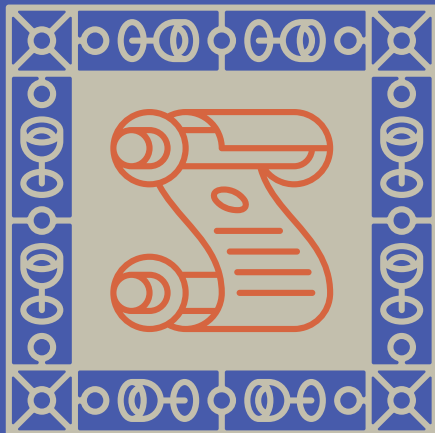
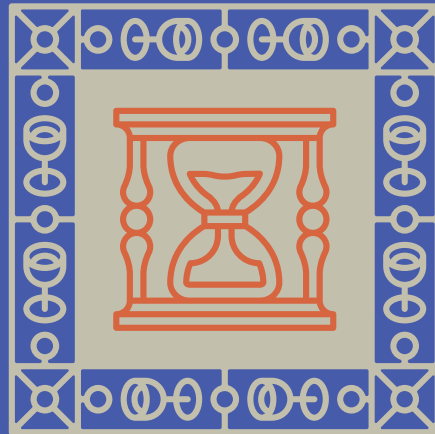
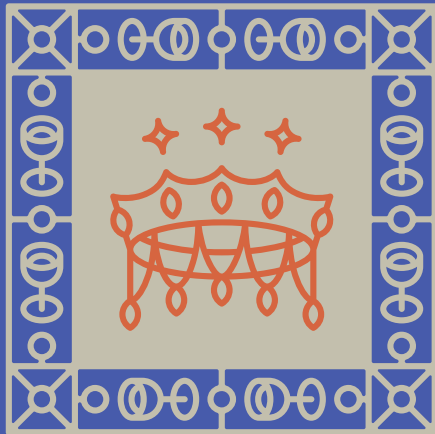
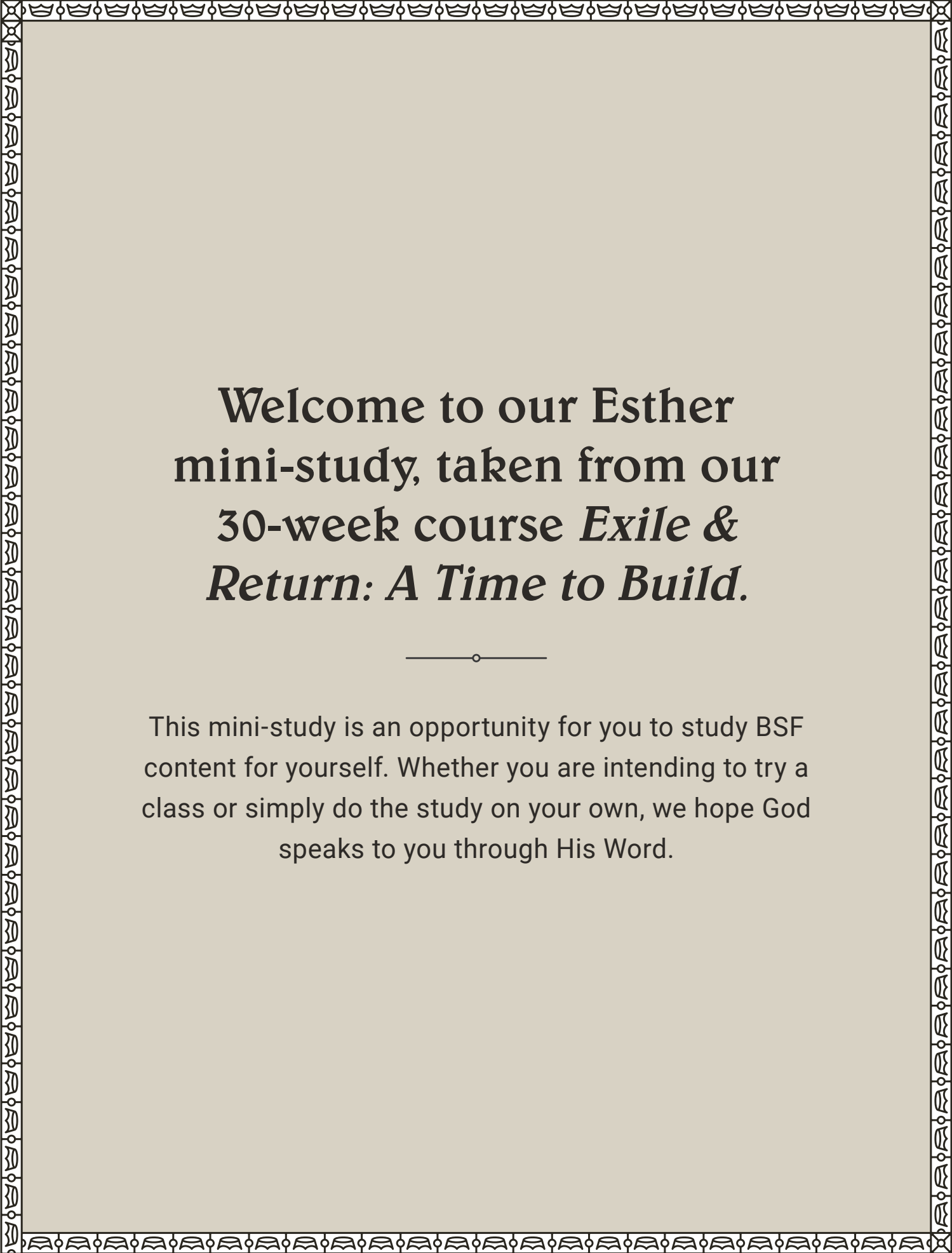


Exile & Return



Esther

BUILD WITH COURAGE



Welcome to our Esther mini-study, taken from our 30-week course *Exile & Return: A Time to Build*.



This mini-study is an opportunity for you to study BSF content for yourself. Whether you are intending to try a class or simply do the study on your own, we hope God speaks to you through His Word.



What is BSF?

Bible Study Fellowship is a global community of 500,000 men, women, students, and kids studying God's Word together. Each year, BSF groups study for 30 weeks, either in person or online.

How does the Bible study work?

This sample study includes three lessons. Each lesson takes one week to complete.

To get started:

1. Read and answer the questions for the assigned passage each day.
2. If completing the study in a BSF group, discuss your answers collectively each week.
3. Listen to the weekly teaching on the week's passage (with your group or via the recorded audio lecture).
4. Read the notes with the passage's historical background and life application.

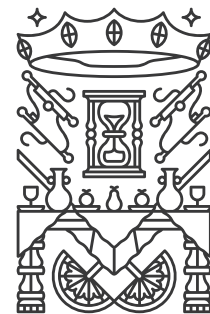
Repeat for each lesson!

How do I join BSF?

If a friend has invited you to join their group, simply attend with them. Otherwise, to find a class in your local area, or to join a BSF Online group, go to join.bsfinternational.org.

We hope you enjoy using this four-fold approach to exploring God's Word in community with others. Thanks for choosing to study with Bible Study Fellowship!





A New Queen

Lesson 13 Questions

Read and answer the questions for the assigned passage each day. If completing the mini-study in a BSF group, answer the questions before the group meets to discuss the answers.

First Day

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What truth from the lecture helped you process the challenge God's people faced and the response of the leaders?
2. How did the notes lead you to consider the seriousness of sin and God's mercy to sinners?

Second Day: Read Esther 1:1-9.

Persian King Xerxes hosted a lengthy, lavish feast.

3. Where did Xerxes (also called Ahasuerus) rule, and what were the boundaries of his kingdom?
4.
 - a. Describe the celebration King Xerxes hosted for his dignitaries.
 - b. What might have motivated Xerxes to host such an event?
5.
 - a. In what ways does our world and your culture define and validate success?

b. How might you be tempted to measure your value by what you do and own?

c. What helps you define your value in a way that pleases God?

Third Day: Read Esther 1:10-22.

Queen Vashti displeased the king.

6. What command did Xerxes issue to Vashti, his queen?

7. Though Scripture does not offer her reasons, why might Vashti have responded as she did?

8. a. How did Xerxes and his officials react to this embarrassing situation?

b. What does this teach you about godly and ungodly expressions of authority?

9. When have you refused to compromise your convictions? What results have you experienced?

Fourth Day: Read Esther 2:1-18.

Xerxes selected Esther as his queen.

10. From verses 1-4, how was a new queen selected?

11. a. How did Esther and Mordecai enter the story in chapter 2? What important details are given in verses 5-7?

b. Why might Mordecai have instructed Esther to keep her Jewish heritage secret?

c. How was Esther treated when she was taken into the royal harem?

12. How did Xerxes respond to Esther?

13. When have you experienced God's favor in ways you did not anticipate?

Fifth Day: Read Esther 2:19-23.

Mordecai foiled an assassination plot.

14. How did Esther continue to honor Mordecai?

15. a. What opportunity was afforded Mordecai, and what was the result?

b. Why is the recording of this incident in Scripture so important?

16. a. How do you recognize God's providential positioning of the details of Esther's and Mordecai's lives?

b. How do you recognize God's providence behind the details of your life?

Sixth Day: Review Esther 1–2.

God positions His people to accomplish His purposes.

17. How does God's sovereignty in Esther 1–2 encourage or challenge you?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Esther 1–2

Next step: Listen to the lecture.

Lecture

Now that you have completed the daily questions, listen to the teaching based on this week's passage. If you are part of a group, you will hear the lecture during your weekly gathering. If you are doing this study on your own, listen to the recorded audio lecture.



There are two ways to listen to this week's audio lecture.

Option 1: Go to bsfinternational.org/trybsf.

Option 2: Scan this QR code.

Lecture Notes

This image shows a full page of blank white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for writing or drawing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Next step: Read the lesson notes.

Lesson 13 Notes

Dig deeper into this week's passage by reading the lesson notes with the passage's historical background and life application.

Esther 1–2

Focus Verse

"Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti." (Esther 2:17)

Outline

- Introduction to the Book of Esther
- An Evil King Deposes a Queen – Esther 1
- A Sovereign God Positions a Queen – Esther 2

Engage

How do you make sense of the details of your life? Each of us is born into a particular family. Our specific abilities and limitations, in-laws and children, workplaces and neighborhoods shape our days and experiences. We often evaluate life's twists and turns as either good or bad. We sometimes long for more opportunities than life has dealt us and wonder if we have made the most of our potential. We live our lives in a distinct slice of time and space. **In the end, is our time on earth a string of random events and haphazard moments?** How does God factor into our lives and this world?

Enter the ancient story of Esther, which incorporates every element of a gripping book we would hesitate to put down. A life-or-death crisis, surprising turns, a wicked villain, a courageous hero and heroine, and a dramatic finish draw us in. However, this book also reveals much about God and His ways. God's hidden workings stand behind every moment in this captivating story. Esther's world was complicated; her story is neither pristine nor predictable. And yet God orchestrated her challenging circumstances in an ungodly country to accomplish His eternal plan. Though God's name is absent, His hand is evident. **God positions His people to accomplish His purposes.** Will you approach this book ready to recognize God's sovereign hand in your life?

● Introduction to the Book of Esther

Life in Exile

The nation of Judah had been taken into captivity in Babylon. Under King Belshazzar, the Babylonian kingdom fell to the Medes and Persians, as recorded in Daniel.¹ Persian King Cyrus fulfilled prophecy

1. Fall of Babylon: Daniel 5

Who Is Esther?

- **Her role:** A Jewish exile chosen as queen in Persia, Esther bravely intervened on behalf of her people, saving them from annihilation.
- **The message of the book of Esther:** God's sovereignty in preserving His people
- **An image to remember:** Scepter

when he allowed Jews to return to their homeland.² After Israel had spent 70 years in captivity, Cyrus issued a decree in 538 BC permitting the first group of about 50,000 exiles to return to their ancestral home.³ Led by Zerubbabel and encouraged by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, this remnant rebuilt the foundation of the Jerusalem temple. While the bulk of the nation remained under captivity in the comforts of Persian civilization, the remnant in Jerusalem encountered hardship and deprivation in the wilderness of their decimated homeland. **Chronologically speaking, Esther's story aligns with the middle of the book of Ezra, between chapters 6 and 7.**

Ezra would lead a second group of exiles back to Jerusalem.⁴ Later, around 444 BC, Nehemiah led a third group of exiles⁵ to rebuild Jerusalem's wall⁶ and return to God,⁷ before he returned to service in Persia.⁸ **These cascading waves of Jews returning to their homeland represent God's restoration of His people.**

A succession of Persian kings followed Cyrus, who ruled from 559-530 BC. **Esther 1:1 sets Esther's story during the reign of the Persian King Xerxes I.** Her story falls before the second group of exiles returned to Israel under King Artaxerxes Longimanus, who was possibly Esther's son or stepson.

The author of Esther is not named, though some have suggested Mordecai (Esther's cousin), Ezra, or Nehemiah. Regardless, we do know that Mordecai recorded certain events.⁹ The book sheds light on the state of Jews living under the Persian Empire. Both the citizens of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah were called "Jews,"¹⁰ a term used even in our own day. **Dispersed throughout the 127 provinces of the huge empire of Persia, the Israelites never lost their covenantal identity established through Abraham.**¹¹ Living in an ungodly culture while adhering to God's laws, the Israelites finally turned away from the idolatry that had plagued them in their own land and had resulted in their exile. Their dietary and religious practices set them apart from the Persians and invited the hatred that emerges in this book.¹² Yet God had not abandoned His people. By God's providence and despite their limitations as captives and foreigners, many Israelites, such as Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Mordecai, and Daniel and his friends, rose to high positions of influence in the Gentile world.

2. **Prophecy of Cyrus:** Isaiah 45:1-5

3. **Return to Israel:** Ezra 1-6

4. **Second return of exiles:** Ezra 7-8

5. **Nehemiah's return:** Nehemiah 2

6. **Jerusalem's wall rebuilt:** Nehemiah 6:15

7. **Revival in Jerusalem:** Nehemiah 7-12

8. **Nehemiah's return to Persia:** Nehemiah 13:6

9. **Mordecai's record:** Esther 9:20

10. **Jews:** Esther 2:5

11. **Covenant:** Genesis 17:1-22

12. **A separated people:** Esther 3:8

The Prominent People in the Book of Esther

The book is named for Esther, whose Hebrew name was Hadassah. **Esther's rare charm captured the attention of King Xerxes, who made her his queen.** An orphan, Esther was adopted by her cousin Mordecai,¹³ who emerged as a fine example in her life. An evil, power-hungry man named Haman rose to power in the Persian regime. An enemy of Esther and her people, Haman, an Agagite, descended from the Amalekites, an opposing nation during the time of Israel's King Saul. Despite God's direct commands and to his nation's peril, Saul spared the Amalekites, including King Agag.¹⁴

God plays a major role in the book of Esther. Though His name is not mentioned, God's providence behind the scenes of Esther's story remains clear. God may seem absent, but He is there. While living in a country opposed to God and His purposes, Esther and Mordecai were strategically positioned by God to trust Him and intervene courageously on behalf of His people. **God works behind the scenes to accomplish the purposes He alone could design and orchestrate.**

Persian Kings Mentioned in Scripture

- **Cyrus the Great (559-530 BC):** Ezra 1–4; Daniel 10:1; Isaiah 44–45
- **Cambyses (530-522 BC):** the Ahasuerus (Hebrew translation) of Ezra 4:6
- **Guamata or Smerdis (522 BC):** probably the Artaxerxes of Ezra 4:7
- **Darius I (Hystaspes) (522-486 BC):** ordered the rebuilding of the temple in Ezra 5–6
- **Xerxes I (486-464 BC):** the Ahasuerus (Hebrew translation) in Esther
- **Artaxerxes Longimanus (464-423 BC):** Ezra 7:1; Nehemiah 2:1; 5:14
- **Darius II (Ochus or Nothus) (423-404 BC):** perhaps referenced in Nehemiah 12:22

The Spiritual Impact of the Book of Esther

Esther's story raises moral questions that are not easily answered. Esther and Mordecai were embroiled in a secular society opposed to God's ways. They kept their Jewish identity secret as Esther entered the sexually charged environment of the royal harem and after she became queen. Yet despite the moral ambiguity within the story, Esther and Mordecai demonstrated courageous faith in God and ultimate allegiance to God's cause above their own welfare. Perhaps their story offers an honest account of the messiness of life in a fallen world. No matter how we evaluate their actions, God's grace and faithfulness stand without question.

Esther's ancient and true story offers encouragement to God's people today. Like Esther and Mordecai, we live in a world that resists God and opposes His people. God calls us to trust His providence in bewildering personal circumstances and bleak world events. Like Jesus Christ Himself,

13. Adopted by Mordecai: Esther 2:7

14. Agag spared: 1 Samuel 15:2-3, 7-9

believers are called to lay down their lives for God and others.¹⁵ We can live with this kind of faith, knowing that God transcends all events of history to work for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.¹⁶ Everything believers face in life offers an opportunity to seek God's higher purposes and prayerfully invite Him into every situation.

● An Evil King Deposes a Queen – Esther 1

The Setting – 1:1-9

In the third year of his reign, Persian King Xerxes hosted a lavish and lengthy banquet for the dignitaries of his empire. **For 180 days, the king displayed his wealth and paraded his earthly glory before princes and nobles.** His honorable guests hailed from 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush (likely from modern-day southern Pakistan to northern Sudan). The king flaunted his accumulated wealth, immense kingdom, and perceived power. The festivities took place in one of Persia's capital cities, Susa, an ancient city in current-day Iran. The citadel in Susa boasted extraordinary splendor. Archaeologists have unearthed the ruins of a great hall, known as the Apadana, measuring 128,000 square feet (11,900 square meters) and supported by 36 elaborately carved columns. The Louvre in Paris displays treasures from this magnificent palace.

Esther 1 describes the excess and luxury of King Xerxes's decor and even the individualized gold drinking goblets used by the banquet guests. **The elaborate seven-day banquet hosted by King Xerxes after the 180-day feast included abundant wine and excessive drinking, which set the stage for the drama to come.** The king's party primarily sought not to honor the guests but to brandish the king's power and prominence. Queen Vashti entertained the women with a separate banquet. Throughout the book of Esther, important events centered around feasts or banquets.

The Offense – 1:10-12a

On the banquet's seventh day, King Xerxes sought to showcase another token of his grand achievements: his beautiful queen. But his plan backfired as Queen Vashti refused his summons. The text does not explain Vashti's response, nor does it exonerate or legitimize her actions. We do know she refused to appear before the king's guests. The king's demand not only breached her sensibilities but also Persian etiquette. The king's excesses, superficiality, and lack of good judgment reveal the state of the kingdom and the decline of basic virtue therein.

The Response – 1:12b-22

Vashti's refusal infuriated King Xerxes, who quickly revealed his fickle, unpredictable character. In a power play that flaunted his supremacy, the king dismissed Vashti. **Embarrassed before his guests, the king sought to rebuff his obstinate queen.** On the advice of his wise men, he issued an irrevocable royal decree throughout Persia and Media deposing Vashti and seeking a new and better queen who would respect his demands. He also sent messages to all parts of the kingdom proclaiming that women should respect their husbands properly and warning all the people not to defy the king.

15. Laying down our lives: 1 John 3:16

16. God's ultimate good: Romans 8:28

The king's actions revealed his weakness and the moral depravity of the nation. **Sin establishes strongholds that corrupt human ability to express goodness and damage the pillars of family and society.** Xerxes tried to establish respect by royal decree rather than by praiseworthy character. Neither the Persian king's standard for a man's rule over his household nor Vashti's public disrespect toward her husband reflected the redeemed and loving relationship God intends within marriage.¹⁷ This scene epitomizes life in this ungodly nation and sets the stage for Esther's entrance into this story.

● A Sovereign God Positions a Queen – Esther 2

The Search for a Replacement– 2:1-4

Four years passed between Vashti's removal and Esther's selection as queen.¹⁸ During this time, Xerxes unsuccessfully attacked Greece and returned to Susa.¹⁹ The king's anger over Vashti's defiance cooled. Did he feel any remorse over his actions? **As Xerxes pondered the situation regarding Vashti, his attendants proposed a plan to search for a new queen.** The new plan appealed to Xerxes but also multiplied his offenses against his people.

Beautiful young virgins were gathered from throughout the kingdom, taken into the king's harem, and given extensive beauty treatments. What would it be like for a family to relinquish their daughter to satisfy the wiles and whims of a lustful king? The families involved likely had no choice when these beautiful young women were taken away. Even though one virgin would be honored and chosen as queen, the sacrifice of these women and their families this should not be ignored.

A Beautiful Woman Named Esther – 2:5-15

Against this backdrop of Xerxes's search for a new queen, we are introduced to Esther and Mordecai. Exiled Jews from the tribe of Benjamin, both Esther and Mordecai bore non-Jewish names. For whatever reason, their families remained in Persia rather than returning to Israel. **Mordecai had adopted and raised his beautiful cousin Esther, who was an orphan.**

The text offers scant details regarding Esther's entrance into the king's harem. We know she was "brought to the citadel of Susa" and that Mordecai vigilantly monitored her welfare, walking near the harem courtyard daily. Does Esther's situation indicate a moral compromise or merely a mandate for which they had no recourse? As the details unfurl, there is no indication that Mordecai or Esther recognized at this point that Esther's situation was part of God's plan to preserve the Israelites. As is often the case, God works in ways we seldom recognize at first. God often advances His plan in ways we cannot fathom.

Mordecai instructed Esther to keep her Jewish heritage secret. His reasons are not clearly stated, nor does the text commend or condemn his decision. Did they feel fearful, threatened, or targeted as foreigners and exiles? Would her ethnicity decrease her chances within the harem? We would like to know more. Regardless of Mordecai's reasons, God would use this situation to accomplish His greater plan.

17. **God's intent for marriage:** Ephesians 5:21-33

18. **Time markers:** Esther 1:3-4; 2:12, 16

19. **Defeat by Greece:** Herodotus, *The Histories of Herodotus*, trans. A. D. Godley (London: Heinemann, 1922), Book 7.

God's Power Accomplishes His Purposes

The Doctrine of God's Sovereignty

When we say God is sovereign, we recognize His control over His universe and all outcomes to accomplish His wise purposes. Esther's story highlights God's sovereign control of human events. By God's design, both Esther and Mordecai rose to influential positions in the Persian Empire and played major roles in preserving the Jewish people. God promised to bring the Messiah through His people, the Israelites. Throughout history, God has prevailed over Satan's plots to undermine His covenant people and plan. Nothing operates outside the scope of God's control and guidance.

God's sovereignty harmonizes all His unlimited attributes, such as His power, wisdom, authority, and goodness.¹ He controls and guides all events for His glory and our good.² God does not exercise His sovereignty arbitrarily but works in ways we cannot fully understand to accomplish His perfect will. Our limited human insight cannot fully comprehend how God works in individual lives and human history.³

As sinful humans, we seek to control our lives in ways we ultimately cannot. We come up short when our energy and wisdom inevitably wane. **Life feels random if we fail to recognize the working of a good and sovereign God behind the twists and turns of our lives and human history.** Without acknowledging a powerful God behind it all, we flounder in uncertainty and purposelessness.

The truth of God's sovereignty provides stabilizing context for our lives and eternity. With God firmly on His throne, we can rest within His higher ways when our understanding falls short. We can yield our need for control and trust God's actual authority. We can face calamity trusting that God will bring an outcome that advances His purposes. Knowing God rules His universe with infinite wisdom and impeccable timing allows us to find peace in this world while we wait for Christ's return. No enemy can overturn what God ordains. How will you trust God when you face impossible odds or crippling uncertainty? In what specific situation will you find comfort in God's sovereignty today?

1. **God's authority:** 1 Chronicles 29:11-12; Psalm 47:7

2. **God's glory and our good:** Romans 8:28-29

3. **God's higher ways:** Isaiah 55:8-9

Undoubtedly due to God's favor, Esther rose to a privileged place in the harem and received premium treatment and privileges. Twelve months of a lavish beauty regime with expensive perfumes, cosmetics, and a special diet prepared Esther for her night with the king. She awaited the moment when she would be summoned by name into the king's chambers.

The realities that came with this special treatment quickly eroded the seeming glamour of the situation. **In a classic example of abuse of power, beautiful young women were robbed of their virginity by an entitled monarch.** They would likely be relegated to a lonely place in the harem for the rest of their lives, unable to marry. Despite the favor extended to Esther, her situation certainly could not have been easy.

The Coronation of the New Queen – 2:16-18

Verse 16 records the month Esther was summoned into the king's chambers. Esther pleased the king more than the other women and won his approval. The attraction seems to have been more than merely physical. Esther was crowned queen, and the king held a celebratory banquet and proclaimed a holiday in Esther's honor. **By God's hand, the new Jewish queen assumed a strategic position for the ultimate good of her people.**

Mordecai Saves the King – Esther 2:19-23

Meanwhile, God's providence was also at work in Mordecai's life. Stationed at the king's gate, Mordecai also seems to have risen to a prominent position. **Mordecai overheard an angry discussion between two of the king's officials who were plotting to assassinate Xerxes.** Mordecai had retained access to Esther and told her about the threat. The queen gave credit to Mordecai as she alerted officials to this danger. An investigation revealed the truth behind the leaked assassination plot. The two disloyal officials were executed by being impaled on poles. The king's life was saved, and the incident was recorded in the king's annals.

What did Mordecai and Esther think after his heroism saved the king's life? Mordecai had acted on behalf of a king who had seized the beautiful cousin entrusted to Mordecai's care. Mordecai received no immediate accolades or promotion for his actions. While a written record was etched in the king's journals, God's hand was writing a story with deeper and wider implications than anyone could imagine. God elevated a Jewish maiden to Persia's royal court. He allowed her Jewish cousin to save the king's life in a remarkable yet briefly acknowledged moment. While these events might appear coincidental, there is more to this story than meets the eye. **God positions His people to accomplish His purposes.** By His divine providence, God orchestrates the circumstances of life to advance His eternal plan.

● Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Esther's story possesses a fair share of drama. The book opens with a dazzling display of a proud ruler's vanity. King Xerxes of Persia flaunted his regal splendor and wealth in an extravagant banquet in Susa. The royal officials of his vast kingdom feasted and drank in opulent splendor and with unrestricted excess. **When his queen refused to flaunt her beauty before the drunken men, Xerxes deposed Queen Vashti and banished her from his presence.** A royal edict circulated through the entire kingdom as an example to women who dared to defy their husbands and to anyone who would consider opposing the king.

Later, Xerxes and his officials instigated a search for a new queen. They gathered beautiful young virgins from throughout the kingdom into his harem. Among them was Esther, a young woman from among the Jewish exiles in Persia. She had been raised by her cousin Mordecai, who watched over her carefully. Against all odds, Esther rose above the competition to be crowned queen. Following Mordecai's instructions, Esther concealed her Jewish heritage. Meanwhile, Mordecai overheard a

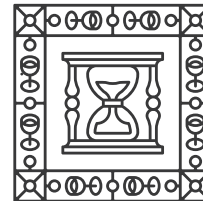
plan to kill Xerxes and foiled the assassination plot by reporting the threat to Esther. The incident was documented in the king's record. More importantly, God positioned both Esther and Mordecai for His greater purposes. **The details of Esther's ongoing story reveal God's amazing providence.**

Apply It

King Xerxes loved being celebrated. Much effort and expense were expended so key people in the kingdom would marvel at his greatness. We can easily criticize Xerxes's shallowness, lust for fame, abuse of power, and lack of accountability. However, before we shake our heads at this ancient monarch, we must look deeply into our own hearts and motives. We all long for our efforts to be acknowledged and appreciated. Do you influence conversations to demonstrate your accomplishments or intelligence? How do you respond when others receive credit and you do not? Social media makes bragging easy and expected. We live in a world that evaluates people based on their positions, possessions, and power. Believers can flaunt God's gifts and blessings for personal benefit rather than humbly acknowledging His grace. **The fleeting allure of worldly applause can obscure our vision of the eternal value of God's pleasure.** What we do and have does not constitute who we are before God. Where do you look for value and identity? God's valiant warriors seldom resemble this world's heroes.

Esther and Mordecai seemed to tumble along in the turbulent current of their circumstances. We read their story today with insights and conclusions they did not have. Their dramatic story emerges one scene at a time. What did they understand? How did they interpret seemingly chaotic circumstances beyond their control? Scripture remains silent on many details that arouse our curiosity. No matter how we judge their motives and actions, God clearly orchestrated the course of their confusing lives. God calls His people to live for Him, even when thrust into environments that do not honor Him. We must learn to trust God for moment-by-moment wisdom to know how to respond to everything we encounter. How do you think and act when you cannot figure out what God is doing? When have you experienced a situation you never would have chosen, only to recognize God's faithfulness in ways you could not anticipate? A dark cloud may temporarily obscure the sun, but its penetrating light blazes no matter what we see. We cannot control all that life brings, but we can lean into the Lord no matter what we face. **Even if we never understand what God is doing, He is worthy of our trust.**

There is much to learn about God in the book of Esther. The fact that His name does not appear in this book elevates His unseen but certain hand behind the scenes. We see God working through ungodly people and harsh circumstances. We marvel at how God upheld His eternal plan without wavering. A self-centered king could not thwart His plan. Royal edicts developed by short-sighted advisors forwarded His purposes. God positioned the right man in the right place to overhear words that became a part of His ongoing story. Even deadly enemies could not change what God ordained. Have you experienced times in your life when you could not feel God's presence? Looking back, can you trace God's hand and purposes through seasons that confounded your understanding? **God may seem silent, but He is always working.** God works through everyday, mundane activities and major events in our lives. No one and nothing can stop what God ordains. Esther's story will point us to God and call us to trust Him. How will you do that today?



An Enemy Outwitted

Lesson 14 Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 13 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. What truth from the notes will you apply as you face your greatest challenge this week?

2. What did you learn from the lecture about how to stand firm and boldly trust God?

Second Day: Read Esther 3.

Proud and newly promoted Haman launched a murderous plot.

3.
 - a. From verses 1-6, describe the conflict between Haman and Mordecai.

 - b. What may have motivated each of them?

4.
 - a. What do Haman's edict and the king's approval reveal about each of them?

b. How might this deadly mandate reflect the prophecy of Genesis 3:15, as well as the words of John 8:44 and Revelation 12:9?

5. In what ways can human pride and selfish motives distort your attitudes and actions? What can you do about it? (See also James 4:7-10.)

Third Day: Read Esther 4.

Haman's murderous edict impacted Mordecai and Esther.

6. Summarize the interaction between Mordecai and Esther in verses 1-11.

7. a. In verses 12-14, how did Mordecai boldly challenge Esther?

b. How did Esther respond?

c. What lessons can you learn from how Esther and Mordecai navigated this challenge?

8. What holds you back when God is calling you to step out for Him? What helps you move forward?

Fourth Day: Read Esther 5.

Esther stepped out in bold, courageous faith.

9. a. From verses 1-8, how did Esther boldly act on her God-given mission?

b. In what ways did her actions reflect wisdom, restraint, and sensitivity to God's leading?

10. How does this chapter further reveal the foolishness that ruled Haman?

11. What helps you discern between your thoughts and ideas and God's ways and guidance? (See also Galatians 5:25.)

Fifth Day: Read Esther 6–7.

The tables turned for Haman and Mordecai.

12. a. How do you see God's sovereignty in the precise timing of the events in chapter 6?
- b. What personal encouragement can you draw from these events?
13. a. In what ways did Esther continue to grow in her courageous obedience?
- b. List the ways God reversed and frustrated the plans of His enemies in these chapters.
- c. What other grand reversals do God's people experience? What reversals can they anticipate? (See also John 3:36; 11:25-26; and Galatians 3:13.)
14. What situation are you facing that you need to entrust to God's greater purpose and plan?

Sixth Day: Review Esther 3–7.

God's enemies never thwart His perfect plan.

15. What attitude or action do you desire to change, based on the truths in this passage?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Esther 3–7

Next step: Listen to the lecture.

Lecture Notes

[illegible]

Next step: Read the lesson notes.

Lesson 14 Notes

Esther 3–7

Focus Verse

“For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14)

Outline

- Haman’s Villainous Plot – Esther 3–5
- God’s Overruling Plan – Esther 6–7

Engage

What have you faced that seemed like a worst-case scenario? Situations such as a cancer diagnosis, family breakdown, a wayward child, unemployment, or the death of a loved one can force us to consider potentially grave outcomes. In addition to life’s common challenges, believers encounter spiritual conflict as they live for God in a world dominated by evil. **Satan opposes everything God ordains.** God’s children can grasp the certainty of their eternal victory yet still struggle with situations that appear hopeless. Do we try to survive the seemingly impossible by powering up and pressing on? Is there a better way?

Esther and Mordecai experienced both unexpected privilege and unanticipated turmoil. They faced peril in Persia without being certain of a happy ending. Esther’s bewildering ups and downs surely tested her resolve but also stretched her growing faith. Still today, God is working beyond what His people—believers in Jesus Christ from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue—can comprehend or feel at any moment. Though vicious enemies oppose the work God is doing in and through His people, God will prevail. **God’s enemies never thwart His perfect plan.** The untold blessings of seeking God far outweigh the pain that calls us to trust God. How will God bolster your faith through Esther’s story?

● Haman’s Villainous Plot – Esther 3–5

In Esther 1 and 2, proud King Xerxes banished his queen when she publicly refused his demands. A search to replace deposed Queen Vashti positioned a beautiful Jewish orphan first in the royal harem and then as Persia’s new queen. **Raised by her cousin Mordecai among the exiled Israelites in Persia, Esther ascended to royalty, strategically stationed to respond to God’s call when crisis erupted.** God also allowed Mordecai to save the king from an assassination plot. Though Esther and Mordecai did not foresee what God was doing, God’s overruling sovereignty was behind the details in their story.

Haman's Scheme – 3

Haman's Promotion (3:1-4) – While Mordecai's lifesaving intervention remained unrewarded, King Xerxes assigned Haman to an enviable post, the equivalent of prime minister. **Haman thrived on empty glory, flattery, and adoration and could not bear to be crossed in the slightest way.** This exalted position brought Haman high honor and fed the ego of an already proud and power-hungry man. Haman, an Agagite, descended from the Amalekites, an enemy tribe that troubled Israel after their exodus from Egypt.¹ Later, King Saul disobeyed God's command and spared the Amalekite King Agag in battle, but the prophet Samuel put Agag to death.² This tribal feud seemed to rear its ugly head even centuries later.

Haman was a man ruled by evil. Proverbs 6:16-19 describes people like him well: "There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community." As the story unfolds, Haman exhibits every one of these evil characteristics.

Mordecai rebelled against the king's command to bow before Haman. Mordecai served at the king's gate³ but took a strong stand of repeated public civil disobedience. The king's officials constantly questioned Mordecai about his non-compliance. Scripture does not supply Mordecai's reason for defying Haman and the king's order. His refusal to bow was apparently related to his Jewish heritage, which he revealed despite his instruction that Esther keep her ethnicity secret.⁴ Some see his act as an unabashed refusal to offer another man honor only due to God, though bowing before royalty did not always imply worship. Others wonder if Mordecai could not offer honor that was demanded, yet undeserved, to a man like Haman. Whatever motivated Mordecai, he chose to stand out rather than blend in.

Haman's Fury (3:5-11) – Mordecai's rebellion incited fiery anger in Haman. **Rather than approach Mordecai or seek a reasonable solution, Haman's ravenous rage quickly escalated.** Not only would he seek revenge against Mordecai, he would also look for a way to exterminate all of Mordecai's people—the Jews—throughout Xerxes's extensive kingdom. Did he find an excuse to unleash his simmering hatred against the Israelite exiles? The text does not fully explain Haman's extreme response. Throughout history, people have tried to remove and outlaw the Jewish people, along with their religion and culture.

In addition to an evil example of ethnic superiority, this confrontation represents the ongoing battle between God's covenant people and Satan's forces, predicted in Genesis 3:15. This conflict still rages today. Undoubtedly Satan fueled Haman's seething anger to accomplish his deadly agenda—to eliminate God's people and foil God's redemptive plan. The ancient Persian Empire illustrates a world system opposed to God, as does Babylon in Revelation.⁵ Satan hates God and His people.

Haman concocted a scheme to carry out his deadly desires. He cast lots (the *pur*) and set a date in the 12th month of Adar. He then took his wretched plan to King Xerxes, giving only veiled details to conceal his murderous intent. Haman described a "certain people" in the kingdom who kept

1. **Israel and the Amalekites:** Exodus 17:8-16; Deuteronomy 25:17-20

2. **Saul's disobedience:** 1 Samuel 15:11-33; 28:18-19

3. **Mordecai's position:** Esther 2:19, 21

4. **Esther's secret:** Esther 2:10, 20

5. **Babylon:** Revelation 17:1-6; 18:1-19:3

The Enemies of God's Plan and His People

The Doctrine of Satan and Demons

Even though the entertainment industry capitalizes on the ongoing conflict between good and evil, few people truly understand the spiritual forces behind that clash. In the distant past, Satan led a large angelic force in rebellion against God.¹ **Throughout human history, Satan has opposed God's people, His plan, and His Son. Only Satan's fury can explain the uncanny and repeated hatred spewed against God's people—the Jews and believers in every age.** Satan unsuccessfully sought to eliminate Jesus in Bethlehem² and tempted Jesus to seek glory apart from the cross.³ Though a terrible enemy, Satan does not share God's omnipotence, omnipresence, or omniscience. Because of Christ's death on the cross, Satan remains a defeated foe who will unscrupulously deceive and destroy people until his final and inevitable defeat when Christ returns.

Haman's deadly scheme reflects Satan's desire to eliminate the Israelites, through whom God had promised to send the Messiah as humanity's Savior. Satan prowls the earth, looking for ways to deceive and devour people⁴ and defeat God, which he cannot do, even in the final battle at Armageddon.⁵ **While Satan wreaks havoc upon God's people, he cannot and will not ultimately defeat them.**⁶

People fall prey to Satan's masterful deception when they fail to understand His insidious nature. **He knows the sinful appetites of fallen humanity and seeks to turn people away from God.** With cunning strategy and manipulation, Satan makes sin look appealing and following God appear foolish. He does everything he can to keep people enslaved to sin and his power. His evil influence should not be underestimated.

God's people should guard against Satan's deception but primarily focus on God's overcoming power. **Aware of Satan's temptation and wily ways, God's people trust the Holy Spirit for power to resist him.**⁷ God will prevail over every deadly strike of an already defeated foe. How will you trust God as you seek to live unswervingly for Him in this world? God is stronger than Satan. God lives within His people. In His power, they can overcome.

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1. **Satan's fall:** Luke 10:18; 2 Peter 2:4; Revelation 12:7-8
 2. **Murder at Bethlehem:** Matthew 2:16-18
 3. **Satan and Jesus:** Matthew 4:1-11; 16:22-23
 4. **Satan's deception:** John 8:44; 1 Peter 5:8-9
 5. **Armageddon:** Revelation 16:16
 6. **Ultimate victory for God's people:** Matthew 16:18
 7. **Resisting Satan:** James 4:7

themselves separate by following different customs and refused to obey the king's laws. Seeking a decree to destroy these "rebels," Haman promised the king an enormous payment, potentially 70 percent of the king's annual revenue. The king's passive response allowed Haman's deadly plan to roll forward. Without sufficient inquiry, Xerxes succumbed to Haman, giving unrestricted permission to carry out his deadly scheme. Passivity is often a culpable accomplice to evil.

The King's Proclamation (3:12-15) – With the king's blessing, Haman formalized his deadly agenda with an official royal edict reaching all corners of the kingdom. The excessive language of the decree highlights Haman's intense hatred. **Haman planned to "destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews— young and old, women and children—on a single day ... and to plunder their goods."** The date for the genocide and pillage was set supposedly by casting lots but ultimately by God's sovereignty. The edict was issued on the 13th day of the first month (Nisan, the first month in the Hebrew calendar). On the 15th day of this same month, the Jews celebrated Passover, remembering God's deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Did they view their current peril in light of God's past faithfulness? Haman's deadly sweep would be carried out in the 12th month. For 11 months, the Jewish people throughout Persia had time to ponder their apparent destruction. Did they mourn? Did they pray? God often allows desperate situations so we will seek the deliverance only He can bring.

Haman and Xerxes callously sat down to drink as the bewildered people of Susa received the unjust order motivated by prejudice. The magnitude of evil behind this diabolical plan cannot be overstated. Satan ignites the evil within human hearts to lie, steal, kill, and destroy as he attempts to derail God's purposes and harm His people. But no one can defeat what God ordains. A human heart ruled by evil refuses to protect the vulnerable, but our righteous God will ultimately overthrow every wicked scheme of Satan.

Esther's Courage – 4–5

Deadly Peril (4:1-11) – As news of Haman's plan permeated the kingdom, Mordecai publicly lamented, donning sackcloth and ashes. He wailed loudly and bitterly throughout the city. In every province, the Jewish people mourned and fasted. Sequestered in the palace, Esther remained unaware of the tragedy befalling her people. **Esther's attendants informed her of Mordecai's grief.** She sent him fresh clothes, which Mordecai refused. Esther then ordered her eunuch to determine the cause of Mordecai's distress.

Esther's servant returned with Mordecai's explanation, a copy of the devastating edict, and a plea for her to intercede before the king on behalf of her people. Mordecai did not seek consolation but cooperation. Through a series of messages, Mordecai's passionate pleas awakened Esther's growing understanding. The peril of Mordecai and her people became personal.

Esther's initial response communicated the impossibility of acting as a mediator. Royal protocol presented an insurmountable obstacle. Unless the king extended his royal scepter to an approaching subject, they were put to death immediately. Furthermore, the king had not summoned Esther for 30 days. Had the king's fickle favor landed on someone else? Esther's official standing as queen did not afford her special privileges. She remained subject to the whims of a king who acted impulsively, selfishly, and foolishly.

A Call of Responsibility (4:12-14) – Esther's reply did not dissuade Mordecai. **Unable and unwilling to ignore his people's peril, Mordecai pressed Esther to consider a bigger picture and more urgent challenge.** First, Mordecai assured Esther that her royal position would not shield her from death alongside her people. Second, if Esther failed to step up and recognize God's purpose in her privileged position, God would save His people another way. Mordecai's plea communicated growing faith in God's promises to preserve His people as an instrument by which to bless the entire world. Mordecai presented a bold challenge to Esther. Would Esther willingly face the consequences of standing up for

her people? Third, Mordecai urged Esther to recognize that she had become queen “for such a time as this.” Would she be a faithful steward of the privilege God had afforded her?

Mordecai’s riveting words speak to us today. Believers live surrounded by people in spiritual peril, with an eternal death sentence on their heads. The summons to step up, speak out, and lead in Christ’s cause can easily be relegated to paid professionals or just anyone else. **We often opt for passivity, hesitating to risk our comfort for God’s cause and the eternal well-being of others.** Does God intend the Christian life to be only comfortable? Mordecai challenged Esther to recognize both God’s sovereign design and her human responsibility. If we fail to recognize our selfishness and the opportunities God ordains, God may send someone else, but we miss untold blessings.

Answering the Challenge Courageously (4:15-17) – Up to this point, all we know about Esther is skin-deep. Now, the plight of Esther’s people challenged her to live for something bigger than her own safety. She unhesitatingly responded with godliness. Esther emerged with dignity and courage and responded to the needs before her. God does not depend on perfect or spiritually mature people to carry out His plan. Instead, He puts ordinary people into challenging situations beyond their control and calls them to depend on Him. The record of Esther’s life does not indicate that she arrived at the palace with fully developed faith or a clear picture of God’s call on her life. However, God’s steady hand guided Esther from situation to situation, leading her forward while entrenched in a godless kingdom and morally questionable situations. **While Esther’s developing faith encourages us, God’s purposefulness amazes us.**

Setting a plan in motion, Esther called all the Jews in Susa to fast along with her and her attendants. She intervened with not only words, but actions. While prayer is not mentioned, we can safely assume that forgoing food and other pleasures prepared the people to seek God and His intervention. **With newfound resolve, Esther committed to stand with God and for her people, even if that meant dying with them.** She declared, “I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”

Daring Petition (5:1-8) – Esther did not initiate a rash or impulsive plan but proceeded with cautious sensitivity and discerning courage. Donning her royal robes, she stood at the entrance of the king’s hall. Was her heart beating wildly as she anticipated the response of the often volatile king? The king extended the royal scepter to Esther, who entered his court respectfully. **Pleased to see her, the king sought Esther’s request, promising her “up to half the kingdom.”** This grandiose offer likely expressed his pleasant mood in an exaggerated way.

Esther invited the king and Haman to a banquet that very day. While the two proud men feasted and drank, the king again asked Esther for her request. Esther invited both men to a second banquet the following day. Esther seemed to understand how to appeal to Haman and the king.

Simmering Fury (5:9-14) – Haman headed home, exuberant over his unexpected honor. His upbeat mood quickly deteriorated to rage when he saw Mordecai at the king’s gate, refusing to rise or show fear at his presence. While he boasted to his wife and consultants about his status and the supreme honor offered by the queen, Haman could not suppress his anger toward Mordecai. His wife and advisors encouraged him to construct a pole (possibly a gallows) on which to kill Mordecai. Delighted by this suggestion, Haman constructed an absurdly tall pole 50 cubits high (roughly 75 feet, 23 meters, or eight stories). **More than adequate to accomplish his deadly designs, Haman’s ridiculously tall pole reflected his inflated ego and overpowering evil.**

● God's Overruling Plan – Esther 6–7

Mordecai Honored – 6

A Divinely Orchestrated Remembrance (6:1-5) – God's sovereign control of the timing and details continued. That night, God seemed to orchestrate the king's insomnia to lead him to divinely appointed reading material. His servants read from the record of his reign, which could possibly enhance sleep but also stroke his ego. **Hearing the record of Mordecai's life-preserving intervention, the king sought to honor this valiant yet unrewarded act.** At that very moment, Haman entered the king's court, ready to ask the king to execute Mordecai.

A Divinely Determined Reversal (6:6-14) – The king asked Haman how he could best honor a worthy man. Interestingly, God led the narrator to record Haman's thoughts. Haman believed he deserved more honor than anyone else. With himself in mind, Haman described a lavish display he would surely enjoy. The honoree should wear one of the king's royal robes and be paraded through the city on a horse, adorned with a royal crest on his head. **Haman stood poised to mount the horse and receive this well-deserved honor.**

The unexpected turn Haman experienced when the king directed this lavish display toward Mordecai reads with the drama and humor of a well-told story. **Haman fulfilled the king's wishes to honor Mordecai and then slunk home, his head covered in grief.** When his wife and friends heard what had happened, they agreed Haman could not stand against a man of Jewish origin. Did they recognize God's unstoppable favor upon His people? Right in the middle of this discussion, the king's eunuchs came to deliver Haman to Esther's second banquet.

Haman Executed – 7

Esther's Request (7:1-6) – With Haman and the king again enjoying food and wine, Esther boldly launched her request to the king. Before witnesses, the king again pledged to give her up to half the kingdom. **With precisely aimed words, Esther identified with her doomed people, who had "been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated."** Her intentional repetition of the edict's wording accentuated the extreme hatred behind the decree.

Acting surprised, the king asked who was responsible for this deadly deed. Was he forgetful, disinterested, or just deflecting responsibility? Again, we lack the details we crave. **Esther punctuated her response with a three-fold identification of her murderous foe: "An adversary and enemy! This vile Haman!"**

Just Retribution (7:7-10) – We can only imagine the look on Haman's face as his situation moved from bad to worse. The enraged king stormed into the palace garden. Realizing the depth of his predicament, Haman stayed behind to beg Esther to spare his life. The king returned just as Haman threw himself on Esther's couch. Assuming the worst, the king accused Haman of molesting the queen. In a grand reversal, Haman died on the absurd instrument of death he had designed for Mordecai. The death decree remained, the villain perished, and God's sovereign purposes prevailed. Despite the evil in this world and the evil intent of people's hearts, God's work in this world cannot be stopped. **God's enemies never thwart His perfect plan.**

● Take to Heart

Hold Fast

The twists and turns in Esther's story clearly reveal God's hand behind every detail. Haman's exalted status fueled the evil lurking within his heart. When Mordecai refused to bow before him, Haman designed an edict to exterminate Mordecai's people, the Jews. Grieved by the horrific news, Mordecai pled with Esther to intervene with King Xerxes for her people. Initially cautious, Esther soon recognized her responsibility and sought God's timing to approach the king. By God's design, the king's sleepless night led to Mordecai being honored by a humiliated Haman.

Esther set up two banquets, revealing to the king her people's plight and Haman's evil plan. The angry king ordered Haman's death on the ridiculously tall gallows or stake he had constructed for Mordecai. Haman's murderous plan reflected not just his internal hatred but the ongoing war between God's people and His enemies. Throughout history, Satan has incited sinful humans in futile attempts to upend God's plan and destroy His people. Satan may cause terror and harm, but God and His purposes will always prevail. **God is stronger than all His enemies.**

Apply It

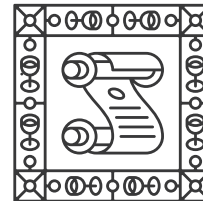
The ancient book of Esther raises social issues and spiritual battles God's people still face today. Esther's story highlights the mistreatment and objectification of people. Though likely acceptable in the culture in which the story is set, this dishonors people created in God's image. Self-centered King Xerxes was served by a harem of women who sacrificed their rights for his sexual pleasure. Men were castrated to serve him as eunuchs. Haman targeted the Jews for extinction based on their ethnicity, an ugly example of deeply rooted prejudice and a wicked sense of ethnic superiority. We see an empire that valued all the wrong things and elevated sin to a place of honor. This book certainly portrays the spiritual battle between God and Satan manifested in our world. Deep hostility toward God and rebellion against what is right lead people to unbelievably wicked attitudes and actions. The abuse of power and victimization of people run rampant in our world, aligning with Satan's vile agenda. How do God's people respond to overt injustice and flagrant wickedness? Ungodly silence is not fitting for God's people. Like He did for Esther, God calls His people to think and live differently. **God positions His people in places where they can make a difference.** Even if the forces of evil seem overwhelming and our contribution in the fight for righteousness seems pitifully small, we should take action—whether by standing out in our attitudes or standing up and speaking out for God. What is God leading you to do today?

Do you see a current dilemma you are facing as an opportunity orchestrated by God? What about your most pressing burden? How might God have positioned you to make a difference in someone else's life? Because God designs the lives of His children for their good and His glory, we should steward the twists and turns of our lives as God-given opportunities. Esther came to recognize her true identity, not as Persia's queen but as God's child. However, she did not barrel forward recklessly; she sought God's timing and plan. **Work for God requires obedient faith, spiritual sensitivity, and personal risk.** Our lives are not our own. God not only offers us unique opportunities, but He supplies the courage, words, and steps we need to act in faith. What spiritual opportunity are you tempted to deflect or ignore? How is God calling you to enter His battle as His child, relying on His strength?

Playing it safe will not allow us to experience God's ultimate purpose for our lives on earth. The world system embroils us in self-centered, power-driven, superficial pursuits. God's kingdom compels us to honor people, uphold righteousness, and live sacrificially. **We find safety and security not within a fortress of human power but sheltered in the strong hands of our mighty God.** Where do you find your identity? What pursuits or pleasures drive you? What are you willing to risk for the sake of righteousness?

Epic reversals dominate Esther's story. God topples evil and upholds righteousness. A notoriously evil man falls, and a righteous man and woman are elevated in influence. As God's people, we long for the reversal of injustice and the release of sin's deadly grip on people we love. In many places today, believers suffer and die for their faith. Christ is worth dying for. He has reversed the curse on humanity and reconciled His people to Himself.⁶ By believing God's promises, we see that today's apparent winners do not represent God's ultimate victors. **A day of final and eternal reversal awaits God's covenant people.** Until that day, God calls us to serve Him purposefully and powerfully.

6. **Reconciliation:** John 3:36; 11:25-26; Galatians 3:13



Justice Prevails

Lesson 15 Questions

First Day: Read Lesson 14 Notes.

The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.

1. How did the notes encourage your faith and give you boldness to stand up for God and others?
2. What truth from the lecture convicted or challenged you regarding a current struggle? How will you respond?

Second Day: Read Esther 8.

The king issued a counter-edict on behalf of the Jews.

3. From verses 1-2, how did Haman's demise impact Esther and Mordecai?
4.
 - a. How did Esther again approach King Xerxes, and what did she ask of Him?
 - b. What lessons do you learn from Esther's bold words and actions?
 - c. For whom or what should you passionately take a stand like Esther?

5. a. How did Mordecai carry out a plan to protect and preserve the Jews?
- b. Why might the Jewish people have responded as they did to the new edict? How did people of other nationalities respond?

Third Day: Read Esther 9:1-19.

The Jews experienced God's victory.

6. Describe what happened on the designated day of battle.
7. a. How was the Jewish victory impacted by their unity of purpose?
- b. Why is having unity of purpose important for believers today? (See also Matthew 12:25 and 1 Corinthians 1:10.)
- c. As you ponder this violent passage in the light of what was at stake, what troubles or encourages you about this scene?
8. What recent spiritual victory might lead you to rejoice and express your gratitude to God?

Fourth Day: Read Esther 9:20-32.

The Jews celebrated God's faithfulness.

9. What did the feast of Purim commemorate?
10. a. Why should God's people always be ready to rejoice, no matter what life brings? (See also Philippians 4:4-6 and 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.)
- b. What truths about God, salvation, and God's work in your life bring you joy?

11. a. How does it help you to remember times you experienced God's faithfulness in specific situations?
- b. What specific truth about God do you want your family, children, and friends to remember? Why?

Fifth Day: Read Esther 10.

Mordecai was recognized as a great man, worthy of honor.

12. What specific character qualities or actions did Mordecai exhibit that contributed to his glowing memorial in chapter 10?
13. a. How does the world's definition of greatness differ from God's definition of greatness?
- b. What might keep you from seeking the good of others more than personal well-being?
14. What positions of influence has God given you to steward, and how can you learn from Mordecai's example?

Sixth Day: Review Esther 8–10.

God reverses sin's deadly edict over His people.

15. How do these chapters reveal God's powerful work on behalf of His people?
16. What practical lessons or life-changing truths has God taught you through the book of Esther?

Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Esther 8–10

Next step: Listen to the lecture.

Lecture Notes

[illegible]

Next step: Read the lesson notes.

Lesson 15 Notes

Esther 8–10

Focus Verse

“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.” (Esther 10:3)

Outline

- Responsive Edict – Esther 8
- Resounding Victory – Esther 9–10
- Reflections on the Book of Esther

Engage

Many things are upside down in this fallen world. Bold, brash, and superficial people receive accolades while quiet, humble, and sincere servants go unnoticed. The poor suffer and the rich prosper. The proud and powerful prey on the weak and vulnerable. Lies parade as truth. We grow perhaps a little wiser as our bodies grow weaker. How can God’s people find hope to navigate a world where brute force seems to matter more than godly character? **God specializes in reversing seemingly irrevocable damage and righting what is wrong.**

The book of Esther clearly reveals God’s power to overturn everything that interferes with His perfect purposes. God foiled wicked Haman’s plot and exposed his evil. God preserved His people and promises, positioning foreigners in high positions even as they were exiled within the world’s most powerful empire. God will eventually overturn everything that opposes Him. Haman’s murderous decree against the Israelites reminds us of sin’s war against humanity.¹ Neither Haman’s wretched plans nor sin’s deceptive stranglehold could stop God’s grace and compassion for people with a death sentence on their heads. **God reverses sin’s deadly edict over His people.** He empowered Esther and Mordecai to bring rescue to the Israelites. But more amazingly, He sent His Son to bear sin’s curse and save His people from eternal disaster.

1. **Sin’s war:** Ephesians 6:11; 1 Peter 2:11

● Responsive Edict – Esther 8

Through God’s silent voice but certain design, Esther and Mordecai rose to influential positions in Persia. God’s chosen people, the Israelites—including Esther and Mordecai—faced extermination due to a deadly edict orchestrated by a power-hungry and evil man, Haman. Seizing an opportunity designed by God, Queen Esther pled with the king on behalf of her people. In a grand reversal, Esther’s

courageous intervention exposed Haman, who died on the gallows he built for Mordecai. A dead villain did not mean the battle was over. **God continued to use His well-placed and instrumental servants to preserve His people and eternal plan.**

Courageous Intervention – 8:1-8

God continued to uphold Esther and Mordecai. On the very day of Haman's brutal death, the king granted Esther the estate of his fallen official. Though Haman sought to plunder the Israelites, his wealth was turned over to Esther. She revealed that Mordecai was her relative, and the king removed his signet ring from Haman's finger and presented it to Mordecai. This very ring had communicated the king's authority when Haman issued his deadly edict against the Israelites. Again, we see God radically reverse the evil plans of a wicked man. The repetition of such important details as the signet ring,¹ official banquets,² and royal edicts distributed by couriers³ highlight the story's drama and God's intentional work behind the scenes.

The wealth and power Esther and Mordecai acquired did not address their most pressing need.

Esther seized upon the fickle king's favor to passionately plead for her people. The first time Esther approached King Xerxes, she did so cautiously. Through two successive banquets, she waited for the opportune moment to reveal Haman's wicked plot to annihilate her people. If her first plea required courage, her second plea demonstrated unrestrained resolve. Esther fell to the king's feet, weeping and begging him to rescind the deadly order against the Israelites. Her perseverance and the weight of her personal burden for her people's welfare demonstrated her newfound dignity and courage in her privileged position.

Following royal protocol, the king extended his scepter to Esther, granting her permission to continue. Though her emotional outburst could have cost her life, Esther pressed on tenaciously. **Leveraging the king's obvious favor, Esther boldly identified with her people and explained the tragedy awaiting them.** Esther did not state her case to the king in a cold, factual manner. The concern for her people that gripped her heart overflowed in an impassioned plea for their safety.

The burdens God gives His people cannot be easily dismissed. Believers should not live callously in this world untouched by the needs of the people surrounding them. God intends for His people to feel the weight of their call to serve Him. As God's representatives, His people intercede and act on behalf of others. **Pleading with God in prayer regarding the needs of others is a believer's high calling.**

Moved by Esther's petition, the king sought a course of action to deal with the threat to the Israelites. Unfortunately, the royal edict could not simply be revoked. Instead, the king commanded that a counter-decree be issued and sealed with his signet ring, carrying official authority. God did not act on Esther's plea to the king in the way she likely imagined. Clearly, God intervened on behalf of His people.

Timely Decree – 8:9-14

Mordecai issued official orders to the Jews and governmental officials. The details of this certified declaration speak to its importance. Mounted couriers carried this royal edict throughout the 127 provinces in the vast kingdom ruled by King Xerxes. The king's signet ring sealed the documents,

1. **Signet ring:** Esther 3:10; 8:2, 8

2. **Banquets:** Esther 1:3, 5, 9; 2:18; 5:5, 12, 14; 7:1, 8

3. **Edicts:** 1:20; 2:8; 3:14-15; 4:8; 8:1, 11-17; 9:1, 13-14

which were translated into every language spoken in the kingdom. Special “fast” horses bred for the king carried the couriers and the important decree. Speed in circulating this important news seems to have been a priority.

If the deadly mandate could not be revoked, what hope did the counter-edict offer? **The king granted Jews in every city the right to assemble and defend themselves.** They had official permission to “destroy, kill and annihilate” anyone who attacked them, repeating the overstated language from Haman’s original death warrant. They could also plunder the wealth of their enemies.

The appointed day for the legal counterattack would fall upon the 13th day of the 12th month, the very day Haman determined by casting lots (the *pur*).⁴ God’s exiled people resided as a minority group in a foreign land and had numerous enemies who desired their demise. By God’s design, the king’s specially bred horses brought comforting news to God’s people. The Jewish defense would not be counted as rebellion but as a rightful action sanctioned by the king.

Grateful Celebration – 8:15-17

The details again point to deeper elements within Esther’s story. **Mordecai left the king’s presence wearing a gold crown and blue, white, and purple royal garments.** This description emphasizes the contrast between Mordecai’s current exalted status and his former place of disdain and mourning.⁵ God brought Mordecai to this influential position to work on behalf of His people.

As the new edict circulated throughout the kingdom, Jews in every province and city received the news with great joy. Feasting and celebrations sprang up, as fear of the Jews seized many people of other nationalities, causing many to convert to Judaism. In another grand reversal, the Jews, formerly seized by fear, celebrated while those who sought the eventual demise of God’s people were fearful. The magnitude of the first edict and mystery of the second surely left onlookers wondering about the power afforded to this foreign nation living in their midst. The Jewish people rejoiced at the promise of victory they had not yet experienced.

● Resounding Victory – Esther 9–10

Like distant thunder rumbling ever closer, Israel’s determined day of vindication drew near. **God set a specific date to deliver His people, defeat their enemies, and prove His power.** The Israelites stood ready to defend what God had ordained.

Enemies Defeated– 9:1-19

As the designated day approached, the Jews gained the upper hand. The passage clearly states Israel’s enemies hated God’s people. What made their response so intense? No doubt Satan fueled their pride and irritation to such a fiery point. The enemies of God hate the people of God.

As the Jews assembled across the land, they prepared to attack those determined to destroy them. **The unity of God’s people struck fear in the hearts of their enemies.** Did they fear Israel’s power or Israel’s God? Clearly, the tables had turned in the favor of the Israelites. In fact, governmental officials sided with the Jews and helped them in deference to Mordecai’s powerful position within the palace.

4. **Date set by Pur:** Esther 3:7

5. **Mordecai’s mourning:** Esther 4:1-2

Undeserved Blessings from God

The Doctrine of Grace

We live in a world where favor and privileges are often earned, not merely granted. Esther and Mordecai experienced relief from trauma by God's hand. Elevated from anonymity to places of influence, they fought for the good of their people, the Israelites. God did not show favor to Esther, Mordecai, or the Israelites because they were unusually worthy of His attention and care. He extended His grace to them out of His love for His children. **Grace refers to unmerited favor extended to the undeserving.** God loves people unconditionally and delights to bless them.

An inherent aspect of God's nature, grace stands as the foundation for salvation in Christ. Sinners offer God nothing that contributes to their salvation. Our sin-tainted works cannot offer the perfection God requires. By faith in Christ and His atoning sacrifice, believers freely receive eternal blessings that cannot be earned.¹ Only by God's grace has sin's deadly edict been reversed. There is nothing we can do on our own to merit salvation. **Not only does God's grace flow to believers when they receive salvation, His grace also sustains them through life and into eternity.**² Daily and eternal expressions of God's grace reveal God's heart for His people in tangible ways.

We fail to recognize our need for God's grace when we overestimate our own goodness. Without understanding and experiencing God's grace, we try to achieve what our best efforts cannot produce. We wrongly magnify self-effort and miss the wonder of God's lavish provision to supply what we need most—salvation based on Christ's merit, not ours.

Understanding our need for God's grace means all the glory for our salvation goes to the Father and His Son, our Savior. We cannot take pride in our achievements nor serve God solely in human strength. Humbled and grateful, believers look to Christ to provide everything they need to know God, walk faithfully as His children, and experience His presence for all eternity. Every morning, God's children awaken to a fresh supply of God's sustaining grace. God provides what we lack because He is good. God views His children through the lens of His inexhaustible grace. How will you respond to the God of all grace?

1. **Salvation by grace:** Romans 3:22-24; Ephesians 2:8-9

2. **Sustaining grace:** John 1:16; Romans 5:2; 2 Corinthians 12:9

The Jews struck down their enemies, killing 500 in the citadel of Susa. **God surely determined their victory.** The king granted Esther's request and issued another edict, which allowed Israel's defense to continue another day. Three hundred more of Israel's enemies were put to death in Susa. The 10 sons of Haman, their avowed enemy, were impaled, and 75,000 men died throughout the land.

The passage does not explain or evaluate Esther's request but simply presents the facts. Some may struggle to process how God used these violent acts to defend His people, uphold His cause, and bring justice against His enemies. **However, the warring Israelites did not kill randomly but defended themselves against those determined to do them harm.** Meanwhile, even though the royal edict allowed them to take plunder from their victims, they refused to do so. The text emphasizes this

repeatedly.⁶ This historic example of retaliation does not represent a precedent for God's people. In this case, God allowed His people an opportunity to stop evil. Verse 17 proclaims that after their resounding victory, the Israelites rested and feasted, with great joy abounding.

Purim Inaugurated – 9:20-32

Mordecai recognized the significance of this conquest. He logged a record of the events and proclaimed an official feast to mark the victory. The people were to celebrate their deliverance with great joy, giving gifts of food to one another and to the poor. Throughout Scripture, God calls upon His people to remember and reflect on their deliverance and victories. Why is this helpful? As earth-bound humans, we are prone to forget what God has done as we are swept away in the flurry of daily life.

Remembering God's past faithfulness teaches us to trust Him with the present and the future.

The Jews established the Feast of Purim, celebrated to this day, to commemorate God's deliverance of His people from Haman's deadly edict. The Jewish calendar begins in the spring with the Feast of the Passover, commemorating Israel's exodus from Egyptian bondage, and ends with the celebration of Purim. In both cases, God preserved and protected His people while they were living in a foreign land. The Feast of Purim draws its name from the *pur*, the casting of lots by Haman. The choice of this name points to how God, not chance, determines the course of His people and human history.

God's people have much to celebrate. Sustained by internal joy that transcends external challenges, God's people place their hope not in comfort or ease but in a God who cannot be thwarted by any enemy. Believers do not rely on emotional or physical fortitude, intelligence, or favorable circumstances to experience God's sustaining power. God upholds His children through brutal trials and desperate times. Even when God does not remove the trial or bring desired relief, His perfect power shines through human weakness and even death. God's plans and purposes will never fail, no matter what.

Mordecai Commended – 10:1-3

The book ends by celebrating Mordecai's highly esteemed role in defending the welfare of the Jews. God raises up individuals to serve Him in extraordinary ways. He also positions people in less obvious places to accomplish eternal work that may go unnoticed. In every case, God is always the hero of His story. **God does His perfect work through imperfect people.** All the glory belongs to God.

God graces His people with gifts and opportunities to serve Him and others. The courage to stand out, the will to speak up, and the results of doing so rest in God's powerful hands. Like Mordecai and Esther, we live in a world surrounded by people crushed by burdens, weighed down by sin, and needing rescue only God can bring. People still languish under the tyranny of mere humans who deem themselves powerful. God is always at work in our upside-down world. Will He find us faithful?

Reflections on the Book of Esther

The dramatic details within this book demand our attention. **Important lessons rise beyond the fascinating story.**

6. **No plunder:** Esther 9:10, 15-16

First and foremost, we see God's overruling providence in positioning and preserving His people to accomplish His plans. God's work behind the scenes remains certain, even when His name is not spoken or even acknowledged. The book of Esther reveals how God overcame opposition to preserve His eternal plan to send the Messiah and redeem a people unto Himself. The story also reveals God's sovereign orchestration of matters big and small. The intentional repetition of key details emphasizes the scope of God's oversight. He works in seemingly insignificant ways to accomplish great things. The breadth and depth of God's tender care reveal His unlimited power. God's active work throughout human history encourages believers living in a world where evil often appears to have the upper hand. God is always at work. We can certainly trust God with both the overall direction and intricate details of our lives.

Second, we recognize that God's people should act responsibly as stewards of God's blessings and opportunities. God did not give Esther and Mordecai privileged positions merely for their own benefit but so they could seek the good of others. They confronted evil and pled for the welfare of the Israelites, taking risks to expose injustice and defend the vulnerable. God sets up His people to accomplish His good purposes, but they must faithfully respond to His purposeful prodding. Our lives are not our own.

Third, in His time and way, God will reverse sin's destruction and defeat His enemies. Unexpected reversals by God's unseen but powerful hand fill Esther's story. God overturned strongholds of human power and evil. Against all odds, the powerless claimed positions of influence. Seemingly irreversible human laws yielded to God's power. All around us, the enemies of God and His people may seem to prosper, but God ultimately prevails. God is in the business of reversing sin's destruction and redeeming people from ultimate disaster. Jesus died on the cross to break sin's power and reverse sin's curse for those who put their faith in Him. One day, God will utterly reclaim the earth, overturning evil and vanquishing His enemies to eternal punishment. Barriers and obstacles that seem impossible to us never threaten God.

Finally, like Esther and Mordecai, God's people live as exiles and aliens in this world, awaiting final deliverance to their eternal home. Esther and Mordecai did not merely survive while exiled in a foreign land. Though embroiled in a godless system and swept up in its messiness, they made a difference. They had not returned to the promised land but worked diligently for good in the place they found themselves. Esther and Mordecai did not isolate themselves but engaged in a hostile environment with wisdom and discernment. Similarly, God has purposes for us within and beyond our day-to-day existence. Where we live and work, the people we meet, the joys we experience, and the challenges we face come by God's design with potential to accomplish good for God's glory. The details of life can consume our focus, but God's greater purposes should not be ignored.

The book of Esther unveils deep truth. While living in a fallen world, we must fasten our eyes on our powerful God as our source of hope and deliverance. God loved us enough to send His Son to save us. Nothing in this world is stronger than God, who holds His people securely in His watchful care. **God reverses sin's deadly edict over His people.** Life in this world will bring challenges, but God works on behalf of His people.

● Take to Heart

Hold Fast

Esther's final chapters conclude this story with resounding victory. After Haman's death, Esther pressed in even harder, passionately pleading for the king to rescind Haman's evil edict. While the original law could not be revoked, the Israelites joyfully received legal authority to defend themselves against those who hated them. On the appointed day, God's people fought valiantly and prevailed victoriously, slaying thousands of their enemies. The Feast of Purim was established to commemorate God's faithfulness to His people.

The book ends by recalling Mordecai's promotion to second in command in Persia. An exile in a foreign land, Mordecai is remembered as a hero of his people. His esteem comes not from his exalted position but because he worked for the good of his people and spoke up for the welfare of the Jews. God's people live as citizens of heaven while exiled on earth. **Only eternity will measure the impact of an individual who forsakes the comfort and supposed safety of this world to stand for God's cause.**

Apply It

People often quote Romans 8:28 when facing circumstances they cannot control or understand: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." The book of Esther portrays this truth gloriously. The entire captivating story heralds God's sovereignty and providence. We often face seemingly insurmountable trials, wearying opposition, and deep pain. **Though God's resolution and reversals may not arrive as swiftly or neatly as we desire, we can trust that He is doing something bigger than we imagine.** What current struggle is stretching your faith? What helps you look to God, not at your troubling circumstances? How will you wait on God and trust His bigger purposes?

Esther's passionate, persistent pleading for her people, at risk to herself, challenges us. What does it take to move you to pray passionately for others? We long for people we love to come to saving faith in Christ or grow spiritually. Too often, our own cares eclipse the investment we make in critical spiritual issues surrounding us. Certainly, our complacency does not diminish God's power. However, as Mordecai warned Esther, our failure to bear and act on a burden God gives us means we miss the blessing He intends. How fervently do you pray for others? When was the last time you pled with God for someone's soul, through tears and anguish? How might God be calling you out of comfortable satisfaction with your own salvation to act on behalf of others? As believers, sometimes we shine our light most brightly within the confines of the Church rather than in places that seem riskier. What step of courageous obedience is God leading you to take? **God calls His people to share His heart for the lost and invest their lives in the eternal good of others.** Believers should not do this grudgingly but with passionate awareness of the privilege God has granted.

Joyful celebration followed the Israelites' victory over their enemies. An annual feast kept the memory of God's gracious intervention alive and personal. How often do you stop to celebrate what God has done in your life? Face your next battle with your past experiences of God's intervention and victories in view. Recount how God called you to saving faith, orchestrated seasons of growth, and allowed you to experience His tender care. Put words around the joy that rises in your heart when you recount His blessings. **Remembering God's past faithfulness prepares us to joyfully anticipate His ongoing**

work in our lives. Too often life's troubles loom large and God's faithfulness seems a distant memory. Intentionally remember. Joyously celebrate. The God who has done great things holds His people in His mighty hands!

An evil man cast lots to determine the date of the Israelites' demise. We face seeming chaos in this world and personal circumstances we often cannot explain. Many believers face physical threats because of their commitment to Christ. But we also know that God has charted the course for His people. Even when we acknowledge God's sovereignty in our minds, our lives tumble forward in confusing ways. Our emotions tempt us to panic or fear. Psalm 16:5 reminds us: "LORD, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure." The Jewish people named their celebratory feast after the instrument of chance that God truly controlled. **As God's children, our "lot" remains secure because God orchestrates everything we encounter.**⁷ If your lot in life bewilders you, trust that God controls what seems out of control. The heavenly Father passionately cares for and invests in the spiritual welfare of His children. Whatever happens, God is with you. Whatever happens, God holds your lot secure. Financial security, worldly fame, favorable circumstances, and a happy family cannot provide the security only found in the God who controls everything. How will you trust Him with your lot today?

7. **God's control:** Proverbs 16:33

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