

# ESTHER



GOD'S PERFECT WORK THROUGH IMPERFECT PEOPLE  
WRITTEN BY REV. FAITH E. PARRY

# PARTICIPANT

# ESTHER

## SESSION 1

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### Introduction to Esther

The book of Esther takes place historically during the reign of King Xerxes (Hebrew name Ahasuerus). He ruled from 486-465 BCE.<sup>1</sup> The book was probably written after the fact, maybe as late as 130 BCE.<sup>2</sup>

There are three sections of the Old Testament scriptures. The book of Esther is located in the Writings. This section is then divided into three subsections. Esther is located in the Five Rolls.

#### **The Law (Torah)**

- Genesis
- Exodus
- Leviticus
- Numbers
- Deuteronomy

#### **The Prophets (Nebhim)**

##### **Former Prophets**

- Joshua
- Judges
- Samuel
- Kings

##### **Latter Prophets**

- Isaiah
- Jeremiah
- Ezekiel
- The Twelve

#### **The Writings (Kethubhim)**

##### **Poetical Books**

- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Job

##### **Five Rolls (Megilloth)**

- Songs of Songs
- Ruth
- Lamentations
- Esther
- Ecclesiastes

##### **Historical Books**

- Daniel
- Ezra-Nehemiah
- Chronicles

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1 Bechtel, 2002, pp. 2-3

2 Davies & Adeney, n.d., p. 299

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## Festival of Purim

The book of Esther is read every year at the festival of Purim. It remembers the story of Esther and Mordecai stopping Haman from destroying the Jews living in Persia. The dates of Purim change, just like Easter, but it lasts for two days either in February or March or the 14 and 15 days of Adar. *The book of Esther is read in synagogues on the evening preceding Purim (thirteenth of Adar), itself a day of fasting, and again on the first of the two days of Purim (cf. 2 Macc. 15:16, “Mordecai’s day”).*<sup>3</sup>

## Characters

**Vashti** — *The wife of King Xerxes. On the last day of a great feast the king commanded Vashti to come before his guests to exhibit her beauty (Esth. 1:10–11). Her refusal so enraged him that she was removed from her royal office (vv. 12–19). Though Xerxes may soon have regretted his hasty decision (2:1), he accepted his attendants’ suggestion that another woman be found to take Vashti’s place as queen (vv. 2–4); that woman was Esther (v. 17).*<sup>4</sup>

**Esther** — *Her Hebrew name was Hadassah, which means “myrtle” (Esth. 2:7). Brought up as an orphan by her cousin Mordecai, Esther lived in Susa, the former capital of Elam, which had been conquered by Persia. She was among the Jews who remained behind in exile during the reign of Xerxes I. After Queen Vashti was banished from the presence of the king, Esther was chosen from a number of young maidens to be queen in her place. In this position she risked her life to play a decisive role in thwarting Haman’s plan to destroy all the Jews in the Persian Empire.*<sup>5</sup>

**Mordecai** — *A Jew of the tribe of Benjamin living in the Persian capital of Susa at the time of King Xerxes. His cousin Esther, whom he had adopted as his daughter, succeeded*

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3 Mayers, 1987, p. 863

4 Mayers, 1987, p. 1036

5 Mayers, 1987, p. 352

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*the deposed Queen Vashti. When Mordecai overheard a plot against Xerxes, Esther communicated it to the king (vv. 21–22), for which he was later rewarded (ch. 6). Mordecai’s refusal to bow before Haman the Agagite antagonized the vizier, who then sought to annihilate the Jews throughout the empire (ch. 3). Again Mordecai enlisted Esther to inform the king of the plot, and thus they thwarted Haman’s plans (chs. 4–5). Mordecai then led the Jews in annihilating their opponents (ch. 9) and subsequently was accorded a place next in rank to the king (10:3).<sup>1</sup>*

**Haman** — *The grand vizier or highest official in the Persian Empire under King Xerxes; son of Hammedatha (Esth. 3:1). In the book of Esther he appears as Mordecai’s adversary and is labelled “the enemy of the Jews” (v. 10). He is called “the Agagite” (e.g., 3:1, 10), which would suggest that he was a descendant of Agag, the Amalekite king. Many, however, think that Haman was a true Persian and suggest that “Agagite” means only that he was a spiritual descendant of the nation of Amalek, one of Israel’s bitter enemies. Most likely, the term refers to a region near Media. In any case, Haman was infuriated by Mordecai’s refusal to do obeisance to him and determined to destroy all of the Jews in the kingdom (v. 6). However, this plan was foiled by the efforts of Esther and Mordecai, and Haman was hanged on the very gallows he had erected for Mordecai (7:10); in the purge which followed his ten sons were also killed (9:6–10).<sup>2</sup>*

**Xerxes** — *Xerxes I (also known as Ahasuerus in the RSV, KJV, CEV, and other translations), king of Persia 486–465 B.C.; the eldest son and successor of Darius I and Atossa, daughter of Cyrus the Great. He is best known for his unsuccessful invasion of Greece, described from the Greek point of view in Herodotus’ Persian Wars; despite initial promise shown by his crossing of the Hellespont in 480, Xerxes’ punitive campaign against Greek participation in the Ionian revolt and the battle of Marathon climaxed in the disastrous sea battle at Salamis later that same year. King Xerxes of the book of Esther, who*

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1 Mayers, 1987, p. 730

2 Mayers, 1987, p. 457

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*deposed his Persian wife Vashti and married the young Jewish woman Esther (Esth. 1:1–2:1, 16–17), is identified with Xerxes (cf. Ezra 4:5–7).<sup>3</sup>*

## Themes to Look For

As you go through this study, keep an eye out for the following themes in the book of Esther. Reflect on how these themes can influence your life and spiritual growth.<sup>4</sup>

### The Importance of Proportion

Being well regulated is a trait that separates the wise and the foolish especially in scripture. You will see characters being unregulated, like the 180-day party that the king throws for the army to show off his wealth and the wise decision of Queen Vashti refusing to be made a spectacle in the affairs. Esther emerges as one who is balanced and not seeking everything for herself.

### The Challenge of Living a Faithful Life in an Unfaithful Culture

The Jews were not being received well as guests at this time in Persia. They tried to honor God in the situation that they were in, even though it was hard. It's easy to be faithful when life is easy but when our world and culture is trying to harm us because of our faith, that when it really matters. When we struggle in our lives, God walks with us.

### The Power of the Written Word

The author of the book of Esther references the written word 63 times: to write (24), law/decreed/edict (19), letter/letter-writer (12), copy (3), letter (2), annals (2), decree (1). That's a lot for a book that's not too long. See if you can figure out the author's connection with the written word as you study the book.

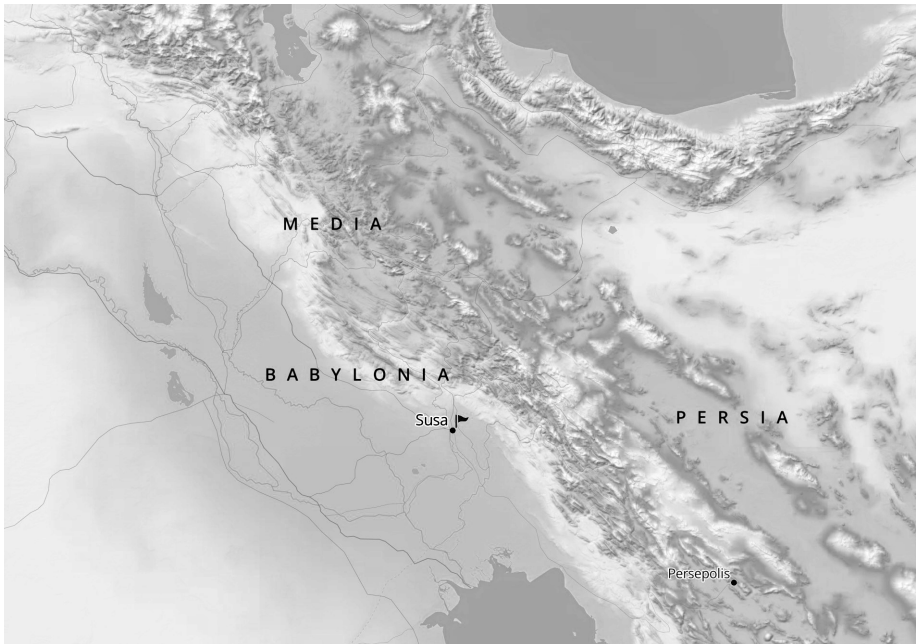
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<sup>3</sup> Mayers, 1987, p. 1073

<sup>4</sup> Bechtel, 2002, pp. 7-15

## Chapter 1

We're going to start with **Esther 1:1-9, The King's Banquet.**<sup>1</sup> King Xerxes ruled over a great kingdom from Susa, but he was a new king. He decided to throw a big excessive banquet to show off his power and wealth to his nobles and officials. For 180 days they had lavish food and drank wine from gold goblets. After the first celebration was over, the king gave a 7-day banquet to honor people regardless of status. Queen Vashti decided to throw a banquet for the women in the palace at the same time.



Moving on to **Esther 1:10-21, Queen Vashti Deposed.** While drunk on wine, King Xerxes instructed his eunuch to bring Queen Vashti to him so he could show her beauty off to those who were present at the banquet. However, the queen knew what she would be walking into and refused to go. The nobles of Persia advised the king that if he did not deal with the situation, women everywhere would think they could refuse their husbands as well. They suggested the king banish the

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<sup>1</sup> Bechtel, 2002; Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1996, 2004, 2015. All references to section titles are taken from the NLT.

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queen. Then he would be forced to choose a new queen. The decree was written and carried out.

## **Overabundance**

Here in the first chapter, we see King Xerxes go overboard with the celebrations and feasting: 180 days of celebration followed by another 7-day feast? Who needs to really celebrate that much with his subjects? He is a new king, so maybe he wants his people to like him, or maybe he wants to show off his wealth and power. It could be a combination of both. By stating that Queen Vashti throws her own banquet, it's clear that she wasn't invited to the celebration or banquet. The king threw a party but left the wives out. There were women, but not the honorable kind. Women were present for entertainment.

Not much is said about why Vashti is throwing her own banquet. Maybe she wants to show support to the other women within the palace. She is probably also new just as the king is. Whatever the reason, it isn't long before the king gets carried away and decides he wants Vashti to come and be part of his show of power and riches.

We don't know Vashti's upbringing or background, but she appears to present herself with grace even though she disobeys her husband the king. She keeps herself as a woman of honor.

## **Thought & Discussion**

As we look at this first chapter of the book of Esther, take some time and think about what you can learn for your life, your culture, your walk with God, and your future. Reflect on these questions and even take some time to journal some answers.

1. What kinds of things do you think were going through Queen Vashti's head?
2. How have you struggled with Over-Abundance in your life (food, money, time, possessions, etc.)?

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3. What do you think King Xerxes was seeking from those he was entertaining?
4. Has there ever been a time when you stood up to someone, but did so with grace?
5. Where do you see God at work at the beginning of this story?

**For next session, read Esther, chapters 1-3.**



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## SESSION 2

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### New Characters

**Hegai** - *A eunuch of the Persian King Xerxes who was in charge of the royal harem. He won the trust of Esther when she was preparing for her meeting with Xerxes (Esth. 2:3, 8, 15).*<sup>1</sup>

**Shaashgaz** - *A eunuch in the court of King Xerxes who was in charge of the king's harem (Esth. 2:14).*<sup>2</sup>

**Teresh & Bigthana** - *Two eunuchs who guarded the royal threshold of King Xerxes and planned to kill the king. Mordecai discovered their plot and had Esther report it to the king (Esth. 2:21–23; cf. 6:2).*<sup>3</sup>

### Chapter 2

In **Esther 2:1-19, Esther Becomes Queen**, we meet Mordecai and Esther for the first time. The chapter starts off with Xerxes regretting his decision to banish Vashti. His decision has been made though and the decree has been written. So women were gathered for the king to choose from. We meet Mordecai, from the tribe of Benjamin, who was among those exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. He was raising Esther, his young beautiful cousin, who's parents had died. Esther went to live among the king's harem in the care of Hegai. Esther impressed Hegai and he started to give her special treatment. He didn't know she was Jewish because Mordecai told her to keep it a secret. Because of Hegai's advice, Xerxes fell in love with Esther and declared her queen and Mordecai becomes a palace official. Esther continued to keep her nationality a secret at Mordecai's suggestion.

**Esther 2:21-23, Mordecai's Loyalty to the King**, is the story of how God paved the way for the redemption of Israel. Mordecai

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1 Mayers, 1987, p. 475

2 Mayers, 1987, p 930

3 Mayers, 1987, p. 994

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was working when he overheard a plot to kill the king. He told Esther and she told Xerxes, crediting Mordecai. The information was recorded in the king's record book.

## Chapter 3

We meet Haman in **Esther 3:1-25, Haman's Plot against the Jews**. Xerxes promoted Haman to be the most powerful in the empire, second only to Xerxes. The king commanded everyone to show Haman respect by bowing before him. But Mordecai refused to bow. The other palace officials asked Mordecai why he refused the king's command. They eventually went to Haman and told him about Mordecai. Haman's rage caused him to seek out a way to destroy all the Jews throughout Xerxes' empire. In Xerxes' 12th year, about 4 years after Esther had been made queen, lots or *purim* were cast to determine what day the Jews would be destroyed. March 7, almost 1 year later, was chosen. Then Haman went to Xerxes to make his request. The king granted him his request. All the Jews would be killed and their property given to those who killed them.

## Old and New Testaments

*Then Haman approached King Xerxes and said, "There is a certain race of people scattered through all the provinces of your empire who keep themselves separate from everyone else. Their laws are different from those of any other people, and they refuse to obey the laws of the king. So it is not in the king's interest to let them live. -Esther 3:8 (NLT)*

*Haman's description of the Israelites is brutal and damning—he intends to wipe out an entire race of people through genocide. And one act of courage from a woman placed in a unique role turns the tide—the fragility of God's people is palpable. Our redemption and salvation depends upon God's strength, not our own, as Paul observes in his letter to the Ephesians.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Group Publishing Inc., 1996, 2004, 2015, 2016, p. 519

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*I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance. I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God’s power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God’s right hand in the heavenly realms. -Ephesians 1:18–20 (NLT)*

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## Thought & Discussion

Esther is now queen and Mordecai has an official position for the king. Although Mordecai has saved the king’s life, he has gotten on Haman’s bad side, Xerxes right hand man.

1. If you were Mordecai, would you have followed the king’s command regarding Haman? Why or why not?
2. Mordecai instructed Esther to keep her nationality a secret before he upset Haman, why do you think that was?
3. What connections do you see between Esther 3:8 and Ephesians 1:18-20?
4. How do you think Esther felt being in the king’s harem and being forced to go to his chamber?

**For next session, read Esther, chapters 4-5.**

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## SESSION 3

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### New Characters

**Hathach** - *A eunuch belonging to the Persian king Xerxes, appointed to attend Queen Esther; it was through him that she learned from Mordecai about Haman's plot against the Jews.*<sup>1</sup>

**Zeresh** - *The wife of Haman, Mordecai's antagonist (Esth. 5:10). At first she counseled Haman to build a gallows for Mordecai (v. 14), but soon predicted her husband's fall before his Jewish enemy (6:13).*<sup>2</sup>

### Chapter 4

Last session, we learned about Haman's plans to destroy the Jews because of Mordecai's actions. We're going to start off with **Esther 4:1-17, Mordecai Requests Esther's Help**. Mordecai is so distraught that he tears his clothes and enters a state of mourning. He goes up to the palace. All over the kingdom, Jews were mourning and fasting because of the king's decree and Haman's plan. Esther's servants came and told her about Mordecai, so she sent them to find out why he was so distraught. Mordecai gave Hathach the decree and told him what had happened. He also instructed Hathach to tell Esther that she had to go to the king on behalf of her people. Esther sent a message back to Mordecai that she was afraid to go before the king without being requested. Esther finally agrees and requests that the Jews all fast together in preparation for her going to the king.

### Old and New Testaments

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*If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your*

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1 Mayers, 1987, p. 466

2 Mayers, 1987, p. 1088

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*relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?” -Esther 4:14, (NLT)*

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*Esther is invited to play a pivotal role in the redemptive history of God's passion for his people. She enters history “for just a time as this.” And Jesus tells his disciples, after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem: “Now the time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory.” Through his death, he says, he will rescue human kind from death. (John 12:23).<sup>3</sup>*

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*Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: “Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I must die.” -Esther 4:15-16 (NLT)*

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Esther's understanding of the situation facing her people brings her to a decisive moment. What she must do is clear—she must risk her life to protect and preserve the Jewish people. She knows it will likely cost her life, but the potential for redemption makes it worth the risk. She is a living metaphor for the sacrificial stance we see later in the life of Christ, when he lays down his life for all people as the ultimate and final sacrifice (Romans 6:5-11). That “laying down” posture is one that Jesus invites us to take as well—a willingness to abandon all, even our very life if necessary, for his kingdom purposes (Luke 9:23-27).<sup>4</sup>

## Chapter 5

After Mordecai rallies Esther, we are brought to **Esther 5:1-8, Esther's Request to the King**. After all of Israel fasted for 3 days, Esther went to the inner court and approached the king. The king welcomed her and she approached him. The king asked what she wanted and she requested the king and Haman to come to a banquet that evening. At the banquet, the king asked what Esther's request was. Her response was

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3 Group Publishing Inc., 1996, 2004, 2015, 2016, p. 520

4 Group Publishing Inc., 1996, 2004, 2015, 2016, p. 520

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for the king and Haman to return to a second banquet the next night.

**Esther 5:9-14, Haman's Plan to Kill Mordecai**, happens after the first night of the banquet. As Haman left the banquet, feeling good about himself, he saw Mordecai sitting at the palace gate still refusing to honor him. He went home and talked with his friends and wife, Zeresh. He boasted about all that he had and the banquet that Esther threw for just him and the king. But then he complained about Mordecai. The friends and Zeresh suggested that Haman kill Mordecai on a pole. Haman set it all up.

## Thought & Discussion

Mordecai has called Esther to put herself at risk so that the Jews living in Persia might be saved. Although she is afraid, she faced her duty to her people like a true queen.

1. How would you have responded if you were Mordecai or the Jews?
2. When have you ever been put in a situation where you were afraid but knew you had to follow God's guidance?
3. Many of us don't take Paul's words that we must be willing to "lay down one's life" literally. How have you done it for others?
4. Why do you think Esther refrained from asking the king her request at the first banquet?

**For next session, read Esther, chapters 6-7.**

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## SESSION 4

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### Chapter 6

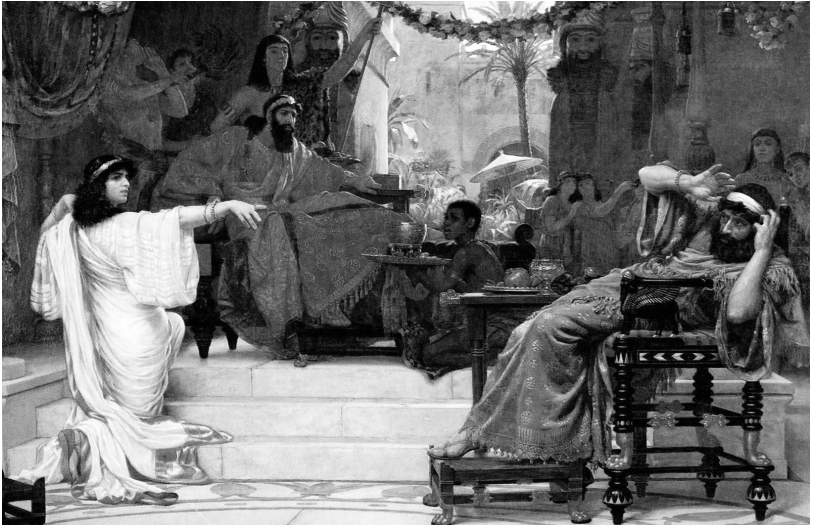
Last week, Esther overcame her fear and approached the king on behalf of Israel. She hosted a banquet for King Xerxes and Haman, but put off her request till a second banquet. After the banquet, Haman made a plan to execute Mordecai. We pick up in **Esther 6:1-14, The King Honors Mordecai**. After the banquet, the king can't sleep so he calls for his book of records to be brought to him. He reads the record of how Mordecai uncovered a plot to assassinate the king but nothing had been done to recognize Mordecai. The king found Haman in the outer court and brought him in for advice. When the king asks Haman's advice, Haman thinks the king wants to honor him, so he comes up with the most extravagant way to honor a person who possibly can. Then the king instructs him to do all the wonderfully honorable things he suggested, but for Mordecai the Jew. When Haman returned home, humiliated, his wife told him that he would never succeed in his plans against Mordecai. As they were talking, the king's servants arrived to escort Haman to Esther's banquet.

### Chapter 7

We move to the banquet in **Esther 7:1-10, The King Executes Haman**. Esther hosts a second banquet, again with King Xerxes and Haman in attendance. The king asked again what the queen was requesting and agreed to give her whatever she wanted. Esther asked for the king to grant her life and the lives of her people. The king was shocked that anyone would threaten the queen and asked who was doing this. Esther responded that it was Haman. The king was enraged over the news. When he heard that Haman had set up an execution for Mordecai, he ordered for Haman to be executed on it that day.

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Esther Denouncing Haman, by Ernest Normand in 1888



## Old and New Testaments

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*So the king and Haman went to Queen Esther's banquet. On this second occasion, while they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, "Tell me what you want, Queen Esther. What is your request? I will give it to you, even if it is half the kingdom!"*

*Queen Esther replied, "If I have found favor with the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my request, I ask that my life and the lives of my people will be spared. For my people and I have been sold to those who would kill, slaughter, and annihilate us. If we had merely been sold as slaves, I could remain quiet, for that would be too trivial a matter to warrant disturbing the king."*

*"Who would do such a thing?" King Xerxes demanded. "Who would be so presumptuous as to touch you?"*

*Esther replied, "This wicked Haman is our adversary and our enemy." Haman grew pale with fright before the king and queen. -Esther 7:1-6 (NLT)*

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*Here Esther responds to the king with a shrewd plan to expose Haman's treachery. Her response is surprising and leveraging,*



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*and it produces redemptive impact. This is the very reason why Jesus urges his disciples to be “shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves.” He says, “God will give you the right words at the right time”—exactly what happens with Esther (Matthew 10:16-20).<sup>1</sup>*

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*Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves. But beware! For you will be handed over to the courts and will be flogged with whips in the synagogues. You will stand trial before governors and kings because you are my followers. But this will be your opportunity to tell the rulers and other unbelievers about me. When you are arrested, don't worry about how to respond or what to say. God will give you the right words at the right time. For it is not you who will be speaking—it will be the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. -Matthew 10:16-20 (NLT)*  
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## Thought & Discussion

Mordecai is honored for saving the king's life. Esther holds her second banquet, and responds to the king's third time asking her what her request was. Haman is killed for his crimes against Esther and her people.

1. Mordecai probably felt a lot of guilt for bringing such troubles on his people. How do you think he felt to be honored by the king?
2. Esther was putting her life at risk to disclose she was a Jew, why do you think she did that?
3. We don't know what Haman said to Esther when he pleaded for his life. What do you think he said?

**For next session, read Esther, chapters 8-9.**

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<sup>1</sup> Group Publishing Inc., 1996, 2004, 2015, 2016, p. 522

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## SESSION 5

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### Chapter 8

Last session, Esther pleaded to Xerxes for the life of the Jews. Haman was executed on the gallows he built for Mordecai. We pick up in **Esther 8:1-17, A Decree to Help the Jews**. Xerxes gives Haman's property to Esther. Then Esther tells the king that Mordecai is her cousin. Mordecai receives the king's signet ring and oversees Esther's property. Esther requests a decree to save her people. It said that Jews could defend themselves, kill anyone who attacked them and take their attackers property. The Jews were filled with joy and they rejoiced. People became Jews out of fear of what the Jews may do if they came against them.

### Chapter 9

**W**e continue the story with **Esther 9:1-19, The Victory of the Jews**. When the two opposing decrees came forward on March 7, the Jews overpowered their enemies. Mordecai's fame spread through the kingdom. The Jews struck down their enemies but they didn't take any plunder. The king asked Esther what else she wanted, and she asked for the Jews to be allowed to defend themselves the next day. The king agreed. They defended themselves against their enemies again, the rested the next day with feasting.

After they defended themselves, we see in **Esther 9:20-31, The Festival of Purim**. Mordecai sends record of these events to all the Jews calling for an annual festival. They were to have a feast and give gifts of food to friends. They would celebrate and remember what happened.

### The Festival of Purim Today

On the 13th of Adar, the Jews defended themselves, and on the 14th of Adar, the rested and celebrated. Today, Jews

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celebrated these events with the Festival of Purim. The night before the 13th of Adar, the book of Esther (*Megillah*) is read in the synagogue. This starts a day of fasting (Fast of Esther) from sundown to sundown. During the day on the 13th, there is an emphasis of giving to the poor. Food or money is given to at least two need people. Gifts of food are also send to friends on this day through a third party.

On the 14th of Adar (Mordecai's Day), the fast is over, so it's time to feast! The meal may start at sundown on the 13th, as soon as the fast ends. People set their nicest table, sing joyous songs, and have lots of fun together. The second reading of Esther is also on the 14th of Adar.

When the *Megillah* is read at the synagogue, children dress up like a masquerade. They often do cheerful characters, such as Mordechai and Esther. When the story is read, they hearers drown out Haman's name with noisemakers and shouting.<sup>1</sup>

## Thought & Discussion

Israel is safe. Esther is not just the wife of Xerxes, she is acting as a queen. To remember the day, the Festive of Purim has been started so that for all time, Israel will remember how God used Esther and Mordecai to save the Jews living in Persia. Every year, the book of Esther is read and the story re-told.

1. What stands out to you about chapters 8 and 9?
2. Do you feel this story expresses our God today?
3. How do you see God protecting his people in today's world like he did then?

**For next session, read Esther, chapters 10.**

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<sup>1</sup> Purim How-To Guide, n.d.

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## SESSION 6

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### Chapter 10

Our story is concluded with **Esther 10:1-3, The Greatness of Xerxes and Mordecai**. Xerxes honors Mordecai by telling all of his great achievements and promoting him to prime minister. The Jews respected him because of the good work he did for his people.

### Old and New Testaments

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*Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews, had plotted to crush and destroy them on the date determined by casting lots (the lots were called purim). But when Esther came before the king, he issued a decree causing Haman's evil plot to backfire, and Haman and his sons were impaled on a sharpened pole. That is why this celebration is called Purim, because it is the ancient word for casting lots.*

*So because of Mordecai's letter and because of what they had experienced, the Jews throughout the realm agreed to inaugurate this tradition and to pass it on to their descendants and to all who became Jews. They declared they would never fail to celebrate these two prescribed days at the appointed time each year. -Esther 9:24-27 (NLT)*  
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*Jesus has just celebrated the Festival of Purim in Jerusalem, referenced here, when he heals a crippled man lying by the pool of Bethesda. This festival recognizes the salvation of Israel by God's hand, through the casting of a lot (the Pur).<sup>1</sup>*

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*Afterward Jesus returned to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish holy days. Inside the city, near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches. Crowds of sick people—blind, lame, or paralyzed—lay on the porches. One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. When Jesus*

<sup>1</sup> Group Publishing Inc., 1996, 2004, 2015, 2016, p. 524

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saw him and knew he had been ill for a long time, he asked him, "Would you like to get well?"

"I can't, sir," the sick man said, "for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me."

Jesus told him, "Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!"

Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up his sleeping mat and began walking! But this miracle happened on the Sabbath, so the Jewish leaders objected. They said to the man who was cured, "You can't work on the Sabbath! The law doesn't allow you to carry that sleeping mat!"

But he replied, "The man who healed me told me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'"

"Who said such a thing as that?" they demanded.

The man didn't know, for Jesus had disappeared into the crowd. But afterward Jesus found him in the Temple and told him, "Now you are well; so stop sinning, or something even worse may happen to you." Then the man went and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had healed him. -John 5:1-15 (NLT)

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## Closing Thoughts

The book of Esther is often disliked because it seems to be a tribute to women who go against the men's system. A deeper look into the book shows something quite different though. It's really the story of two Jews, following God's path. They are put into situations they didn't choose but they chose to step out in faith. It's a story of people who are all imperfect, even Mordecai and Esther make mistakes. Yet God brings forth a perfect plan to deliver Israel.

# ESTHER

## Thought & Discussion

Mordecai is entered into a place of honor and Israel is safe.

1. How can you use the story of Esther and Mordecai to change the way you trust God during difficult times?
2. Where has your faith been stretched during these 6 sessions?
3. What questions have been left unanswered about the story?
4. What have you learned about overabundance and balance?
5. Where did you see the connection of living a faithful life then and now?
6. How have you seen the power of the written word?

# ESTHER

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# **READING SCHEDULE**

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**Session 1 - Intro & Chapter 1**

**Session 2 - Chapters 2 & 3**

**Session 3 - Chapter 4 & 5**

**Session 4 - Chapter 6 & 7**

**Session 5 - Chapters 8 & 9**

**Session 6 - Chapter 10 &  
Conclusion**

**To watch the session videos, visit  
[sumc.io/esthervideos](https://sumc.io/esthervideos)**