

Esther

THE SILENT SOVEREIGNTY OF THE UNSEEN GOD

Esther

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Esther

PREFACE

"The Books of Esther and Ruth are not really stories about their respective 'heroines.' Rather, they are part of the Bible's larger story about God and his dealings with his people, and with the world. This is true even though the Book of Esther does not so much as mention the name of God. As in everyday life, God's intervention is everywhere visible in the Book of Esther, even though his presence is concealed. The essential conflict between the two kingdoms—the empire of Ahasuerus and the kingdom of God—plays itself out in the lives of flawed and unexpected individuals, as God delivers his people once again from the threat of extinction...In both stories, the grace of God to the undeserving and the outcasts is prominently on display.

Both stories thus constantly point us forward to Christ as the one in whom that grace will fully and finally come to aliens and strangers, redeeming rebellious sinners and making them into God's new people."

Iain Duguid, *Esther: Reformed Expository Commentary*

Esther

STUDY 1 – THE DOWNFALL OF A QUEEN

READ: ESTHER 1:1–22

“If it please the king, let a royal order go out from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes so that it may not be repealed, that Vashti is never again to come before King Ahasuerus. And let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she.” –Esther 1:19

OVERVIEW

If the Book of Esther can be confusing due to its lack of references to God, then the opening chapter can be even more confusing due to its lack of reference to God’s people. Yet these first paragraphs set the stage for the unfolding drama of the Israelites, who are seemingly caught between an all-powerful tyrant and all-too-distant God.

The story of Esther begins at a party thrown by King Ahasuerus. This wasn’t just any party; it was a 6-month bender meant to display the king’s greatness. Guests enjoyed the finest wine in golden goblets while they relaxed on couches of silver. Think something along the lines of *Animal House* mixed with *MTV Cribs*. As you read the description of the party, you can’t help but be in awe of the decadence and power of this king who rules a stretch of land reaching from India to Ethiopia. But, starting in verse 10, that power quickly gives way to weakness.

After many rounds of wine in golden goblets, the king asks Vashti, his queen, to come wearing her crown so that he and his not-so-sober friends can stare at her beauty. But the queen refuses the order of the king, in outright defiance of his will. King Ahasuerus quickly becomes anxious that this incident will spread, tarnishing his all-powerful image. In an attempt to retain his power, the king’s officials suggest he send out a decree, “written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes,” that a new queen be named to replace the defiant Vashti. This sudden, knee-jerk reaction from the king would make anyone paying attention wonder, “Are you *really* in control?”

The opening scenes of the story of Esther introduce a contrast between Ahasuerus’ kingdom and God’s Kingdom. As we read on, God’s people will become increasingly under threat. It is through this dilemma that we see the most powerful king in the world revealed as a mere man in all his confusion and weakness. We also see God, who appearing to be absent is present, and appearing to be silent is working to save his people. This, in many ways, is the mystery we experience today as we await the return of the resurrected Christ. Though he is no longer present on earth, Jesus is alive, restoring people and renewing his creation.



MESSAGE NOTES AND APPLICATION

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

PASSAGE QUESTIONS

1. As you read through the Book of Esther, you may be surprised to discover it never mentions God. This distance of God's *name* is compounded by the fact that his people are also distant from his *presence* in Jerusalem. Has there been a time when God seemed distant from you?

2. How do you react when God seems silent during a difficult situation? Frustrated? Confused? Depressed?



PRAYER

God, in the silence you are always working through your son, Jesus, for the good of your people. Help us to see your presence and work in ways we've missed. Help us to experience your redemptive power in the places you are at work. Encourage us this week to know that you are always greater than our circumstances, and in your love we are always secure.

Amen.

PRAYER REQUESTS

Esther

STUDY 2 – BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

READ: ESTHER 2:1–23

The LORD is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love. –Zephaniah 3:17

OVERVIEW

This next chapter introduces Mordecai and Esther, whom God will use to save his people...but at first glance it's hard to see how that will happen. After removing Queen Vashti from her position, King Ahasuerus comes down from his initial anger at her defiance and seems saddened that he no longer has a queen. In an effort to cheer the king up, some of his "young men" remind him he has a whole empire of women he can draw from to select his next queen. The king likes this idea and sends out for a collection of women with the potential to be the next Queen of Persia.

During this empire-wide gathering of women, we're introduced Esther, an orphan raised by her cousin Mordecai and described as a very beautiful young woman. She is selected to join the king's harem and immediately wins over the favor of Hegai, the eunuch in charge of the harem. After a yearlong period of preparation, the women would each spend a night with the king in his palace, and he would select his favorite to become queen. As with Hegai, Esther wins over the king after her night in the royal palace. The king is so captivated by her that he names Esther the Queen of Persia. After Esther is made queen, Mordecai discovers a plot from two men to kill the king. He tells Esther of the plot, and Esther then shares Mordecai's warning with the king, saving the king's life.

Throughout this chapter, we encounter puzzling actions by Esther and Mordecai. Esther, an Israelite, not only sleeps with a Gentile man, but then becomes Queen of the Persians, a people who weren't really down with worshipping the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to say the least. Throughout all of this, Mordecai tells Esther to conceal her Hebrew heritage and assimilate to whatever new social norms she runs into.

None of this really screams, "Oh, these people are *clearly* the righteous ones God's been waiting for!" And perhaps that is the point. God continually works through flawed, broken, sinful people, because by his grace, our righteousness isn't the ticket into his Kingdom; Jesus' righteousness is. This is *not* to condone the actions of Esther and Mordecai, but to remind us that, in Christ, our past sins don't disqualify us from present contribution to God's mission.

Esther

MESSAGE NOTES AND APPLICATION

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

PASSAGE QUESTIONS

1. The author of Esther seems to make a point *not* to comment either way on the actions of Esther and Mordecai, though they are in direct violation of God's Law. When you read through this chapter, how do you respond to their actions? Sympathetic? Confused? Frustrated?
2. The fact that Esther and Mordecai are sinners shouldn't come as a surprise. They are exiled in Persia due to a legacy of blatant sin stretching back generations in God's people. Yet God still chooses to use them. Do you ever struggle thinking certain past sins have disqualified you from God working through you? Why?

Esther

3. Read Zephaniah 3:14-17. God spoke these words to his people when they were entrenched in their deepest sin. These verses point forward to the cross where God secured our redemption by pouring out his wrath on Jesus, so that he could pour out his love on us. Do you ever find it hard to believe that, in Christ, God sings over you just as much on your worst days as on your best?
4. A growing theme in Esther is the contrast between Ahasuerus' kingdom and God's Kingdom. In this chapter, we see the king using women as commodities. How does this contrast with how God redemptively uses Esther?
5. We're all tempted to use people to build our own kingdom. How does God's one-way love free you from *using* people to *loving* people for his Kingdom?



PRAYER

Gracious God,
My heart beats out in thankfulness to you,
for your amazing grace
for the help of your Spirit
for the joy in serving you
for the hope of your New Earth
for the provision that never fails
for the new creation you have made
raising me to life when I was dead.

Amen.

-Adapted from *The Valley of Vision*

PRAYER REQUESTS



STUDY 3 – TOTAL ANNIHILATION

READ: ESTHER 3:1–15

Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king's laws, so that it is not to the king's profit to tolerate them. If it please the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed..." –Esther 3:8-9a

OVERVIEW

Chapter 3 opens with Mordecai receiving a royal snub. If you recall back to the end of chapter 2, Mordecai had unearthed a plot to assassinate King Ahasuerus. Leveraging his connection to Queen Esther, Mordecai informed her of the plot, saving the king's life. Normally, this would have resulted in a generous gift from the king to Mordecai, but the reward never came. After some time, the king then decided to honor Haman the Agagite, appointing him to a position higher than any other noble and commanding that everyone bow to him.

One day outside the king's gate, Haman was walking by a group of people and, following the king's orders, they all bowed...all except for Mordecai. The author of Esther doesn't clearly explain why Mordecai refused to bow, but we are told exactly how Haman felt about Mordecai's refusal. He was enraged! Haman immediately plotted a way to punish Mordecai and, after poking around some, discovered that Mordecai was Jewish. Haman then went to the king and convinced him that this act of Mordecai could only have one response: complete annihilation of the Jews. King Ahasuerus agreed with Haman's request, and the chapter ends with an edict sent out to kill all of God's people.

This introduces the main conflict in the Book of Esther. Will the Lord show up and save his people, or will he let them be killed by the Persians? As the story moves on, we see how this question has already begun to be answered. Though he is unaware of it, the king is now in love with Esther, a Jew, whom God has appointed to this position at this very time so that she can be used to save his people.

This chapter also highlights the contrast between King Ahasuerus' kingdom and God's Kingdom. Mordecai's relatively small infraction caused the king to agree with the wholesale slaughter of an entire race of people. This isn't justice; it's insecurity masked by brutality. In God's Kingdom, however, we discover that our sin against him is no small infraction. Unlike Mordecai's act, our rebellion does demand swift justice. Yet God is not like the king in this story. While Ahasuerus acts in *anger*, God acts in *love*. He satisfies the need for justice by being punished for us on the cross and declaring our vindication in the Resurrection.



MESSAGE NOTES AND APPLICATION

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

PASSAGE QUESTIONS

1. Chapter 3 unfolds the plotted destruction of an entire race of people due to one guy not bowing to another guy...it sounds a little ridiculous when you say it out loud. Even though Mordecai's action was offensive, it didn't seem to warrant the response. Yet we all struggle with anger. What's something you get angry about?
2. Tim Keller explains anger as protecting something we love. For instance, when someone critiques us we get angry because we feel our reputation is in danger. Think about something you regularly get angry about. Underneath that anger, what is it that you love and are trying to protect?



PRAYER

All-powerful God, through your son, Jesus, you have overcome death and opened wide the way to everlasting life. We ask you, by your grace, to empower us to love you more and more, filling our minds and hearts with desire for you. Work in us through Jesus, who rules and reigns with you, and through your Spirit.

Amen.

–Adapted from, *The Collects of Thomas Cranmer*

PRAYER REQUESTS

Esther

STUDY 4 – IF I PERISH, I PERISH

READ: ESTHER 4:1-17

"If you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" –Esther 4:14

OVERVIEW

Chapter 4 marks a turning point in the life of Esther as the threat of extinction of God's people reaches a climax. The story picks up when Mordecai learns of the decree sent out, prompted by Haman, to destroy the Jews. Immediately, God's people turn to fasting and mourning, with many sitting in sackcloth and ashes, a sign of grief and repentance. Meanwhile, Esther, a Jew herself, seems aloof from the whole situation.

After Esther's servants tell her that Mordecai is also grieving and lying in sackcloth, she offers to send him a new pair of jeans...not really the most touching moment. At first glance, Esther's response to Mordecai seems insensitive. Yet, in reality, it wasn't cold-hearted insensitivity; it was ignorance. Because she no longer identifies with them, Esther is completely unaware of the impending genocide of God's people. Her *ignorance* to the plan was fueled by her *isolation* from her true calling as a daughter of God.

But Mordecai will not let Esther completely forget *who* she is and *whose* she is. In an attempt to turn her heart back to God and his people, Mordecai confronts the queen, asking her, "is it at all possible that you have become queen for the simple reason of God using you to save his people?" Mordecai is pleading with Esther to remember her true identity, an identity that is calling her right now into action. The tense confrontation manages to cut through to Esther's heart, and she calls for all God's people to fast with her for three days until she will risk her life by going to the king to plead for the Jews.

This highlights another stark contrast between King Ahasuerus' kingdom and God's Kingdom. In King Ahasuerus' kingdom, Esther, in *fear*, is acting as a mediator to save God's people. Yet in God's Kingdom, Jesus, in *joy*, acts as a mediator to save God's people. Unlike Esther and the king, Jesus doesn't enter his Father's presence in fear of a tyrannical ruler, but in joy of his heavenly Father who, in love, has sent Jesus for the simple purpose of using him to save you and me.

Esther

MESSAGE NOTES AND APPLICATION

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

PASSAGE QUESTIONS

1. We've all had a sudden, unexpected life crisis. What are some of the ways you've responded to these moments?

2. In the Old Testament, God's people generally respond to crisis with a trio of lying in sackcloth, mourning, and prayer. Yet in Chapter 4 of Esther, prayer is never mentioned. Do you find it difficult or easy to turn to prayer in moments of crisis? Why?

Esther

3. Read John 17:9-11, 20-23. How does the fact that Jesus is praying for you, right now, comfort you when you struggle to pray?
4. Though Esther was handpicked by King Ahasuerus from all the women of Persia to be his queen, she still feared approaching him. Even though God is very different from the king in this story, we sometimes view him like Esther viewed Ahasuerus. What has at times made you afraid to approach God?
5. Read Romans 8:14-15. How does the reality of God's one-way love, poured out on you through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, turn your moments of fear of him into joy?



PRAYER

God, thank you that through your son, Jesus, we have a mediator who acts not in fear, but in joy as you use him to save your people. Give us joy this week in the redemption that comes through Christ. Empower us to live out our identity as your sons and daughters as you use us to bring renewal and resurrection through your son.

Amen.

PRAYER REQUESTS

Esther

STUDY 5 – MEEKNESS AND SUBTLETY

READ: ESTHER 5:1–14

Then Esther answered, “My wish and my request is: If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my wish and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come to the feast that I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said.” –Esther 5:7-8

OVERVIEW

Chapter 5 begins as we hold our breath, wondering what will happen to Esther and God’s people. Previously, Mordecai had convinced Queen Esther to risk her life by approaching the king to plead for the sake of God’s people. Chapter 4 closes with Esther asking all of the Jews to join her in a fast for three days, until she will approach the king. As Chapter 5 opens, this cliffhanger reaches its climax. Esther walks into the king’s presence, and in her moment of uncertainty, he extends his golden scepter, sparing her life.

The king then asks Esther what she desires, telling her that he will give her whatever she wants, even if it is half of his kingdom. Yet Esther punts on answering the king’s question, instead asking the king and Haman to join her at a feast she is throwing for them the next day. The king and Haman, who are no strangers to a good party, join Esther. At the feast, the king again tells his queen he will give her whatever she wants, even half of his kingdom...but Esther punts once again, inviting the king to another night out, which he agrees to because...well...the king likes to party.

At the end of the feast, Haman leaves having enjoyed more than his share from golden wine goblets and silver shot glasses, but he also leaves drunk on something even more powerful: *prestige*. This is revealed when Mordecai refuses again to bow to Haman at the king’s gate. Haman becomes furious, going home to his wife and friends who listen to him tell all about how great he is (vv. 11-12) and console him by agreeing that the best thing for him to do would be to string up Mordecai on the tallest gallows man could make.

The resolution of this chapter’s initial cliffhanger—the queen risking her life to enter the king’s presence—again contrasts life in King Ahasuerus’ empire with life in God’s Kingdom. In the story of Esther, the queen approaches the king trembling in fear, hoping to catch him on a good day and not be killed. Yet in God’s Kingdom, those in Christ do not have to fear entering into our Father’s presence. Unlike King Ahasuerus, we know that our Heavenly King will always extend his golden scepter to us, because his rod of judgment has already been taken by Jesus on our behalf.



MESSAGE NOTES AND APPLICATION

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

PASSAGE QUESTIONS

1. Chapter 5 shows the great power our idols can have over us. Read verses 9-14. What idol do you see Haman wrestling with? Why?

2. The advice of Haman's friends feeds his idolatry of power and prestige. But Hanging Mordecai 75 feet in the air will only draw greater attention to Mordecai, inevitably causing Haman to be more furious that people aren't talking about him. He jumps on the idea, though, because he is enslaved to his idol. Can you remember a time when you felt powerless to an idol in your life?

Esther

3. Read Romans 6:5-11. How does Jesus' death and resurrection free us from the power of our idols?
4. This chapter begins with Esther trembling as she approaches the king, fearing for her life. When you think about coming into God's presence, how do you feel?
5. Hebrews 10:19 tells us that we can confidently enter God's presence because of the blood of Christ. How does the cross ensure that we always receive God's "golden scepter"? What about this is difficult for you to believe?

Esther

PRAYER

We thank you God,
who sent your Son to save us,
who raised him from the dead,
and set him at your right hand.

We thank you Jesus,
the Lamb of God who redeems us by your blood,
the heavenly Priest who lives to intercede for us,
the eternal King who comes again to make all things new.

We thank you Holy Spirit
who poured out the love of God,
who made us alive with Christ,
and sits us with him in heavenly places.

Blessing and glory,
wisdom and thanksgiving,
honor and power and might,
are yours God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

- Adapted from Thomas F. Torrance

PRAYER REQUESTS



STUDY 6 – THE GREAT REVERSAL

READ: ESTHER 6:1–7:10

So Haman came in, and the king said to him, “What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?” And Haman said to himself, “Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?” ... Then the king said, “Hurry; take the robes and the horse ... and do so to Mordecai the Jew...” –Esther 6:6, 10

OVERVIEW

The next two chapters of Esther detail the ironic great reversal of the story’s major conflicts, the first of these being the imminent murder of Mordecai by Haman and the second being the imminent extermination of the Jews by the Persians. Both of these great reversals show that, even when never mentioned directly, God is anything but absent in the problems his people face.

Chapter 6 begins as King Ahasuerus is struggling to sleep one night. Pre-cell phones and Hulu, the king asks for “the book of memorable deeds” to be read to him. As he listens, the king is reminded of how Mordecai saved his life by unveiling an assassination plot (2:19-23). Upon remembering this, the king then learns that nothing was ever done to honor Mordecai. He immediately calls for the first person in the court to come, put a royal robe on Mordecai, and lead him through the city square honoring him. Ironically, it is Haman, who has been standing in the king’s waiting room and undoubtedly rehearsing his pitch to execute Mordecai, who gets enlisted to for the job. Brilliant.

This is just the first of two great reversals. After Haman finishes leading a victory parade for the man he wants dead, he arrives at the party Esther had thrown for Haman and the king. Previously, the king agreed to give Esther whatever she wished at this feast, even if it was half his kingdom (5:6-8). Esther seizes the moment and tells the king that someone has paid to have her and her people killed. The king is incensed! He demands to know who arranged this, to which Esther points out Haman, “a foe and enemy.” In a furious rage, the king arranges for Haman to be brought to his house and hanged on the gallows that were originally reserved for Mordecai. Yet Chapter 7 ends with the most pressing question still unanswered: Will the king go back on his word and save God’s people?

These chapters not only highlight the silent sovereignty of God, but also the contrast between honor and approval in King Ahasuerus’ empire versus God’s Kingdom. Mordecai is given the highest honor of the king in response to saving the king’s life. It was affirmation as reward. In God’s Kingdom, we see the opposite. Because of our sin, even if we tried as hard as we could, you and I would never earn God’s affirmation. But Jesus lived a life of honor, and then suffered a death of dishonor, so that you could hear an eternal “well done” from your heavenly King.



MESSAGE NOTES AND APPLICATION

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

PASSAGE QUESTIONS

1. In Chapter 6, Mordecai is given the highest honor of the king, a royal robe and a parade in the city square, in reward for saving the king's life. We all enjoy honor and affirmation from other people. Share a memorable time when someone honored and affirmed you. What made it so special?

2. Our sin has put our loves "out of order," and we value many things above God. What people or things are you tempted to value the affirmation and honor of above the affirmation and honor of God? Why?



PRAYER

Oh, Lord, all the day long we pursue other loves.

We pretend we love You, but our hearts are far from You. We continually reach out and grasp for other desires,

But they turn to ashes in our hands.

Oh, Lord, we are always eating, but are never filled.

We are always drinking, but our thirst is never quenched.

We are a weary and desperate people.

Have mercy on us, Lord, and rescue us from ourselves.

Help us to see that You are our true desire, our greatest love, our one affection. You are the Bread of Life, the Fountain of Living Water.

Open our eyes to the richness found in Your Word,

To the bounty that awaits when we come to Your table.

May we taste and see that You are good.

May we seek You all the day long.

For in You is fullness of joy, and at Your right hand are pleasures forever.

We ask this in Your name, Lord—gracious Savior, Redeemer and King.

Amen.

-Book of Prayers (Vol. 2), from The Village Church

PRAYER REQUESTS

Esther

STUDY 7 – IT AIN’T OVER TILL IT’S OVER

READ: ESTHER 8:1–17

Then Esther spoke again to the king. She fell at his feet and wept and pleaded with him to avert the evil plan of Haman the Agagite and the plot that he had devised against the Jews...And she said, "If it please the king, and if I have found favor in his sight, and if the thing seems right before the king, and I am pleasing in his eyes, let an order be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman..." –Esther 8:3–5a

OVERVIEW

As chapter 8 begins, much still hangs in the balance for God’s people. Though Haman, the man responsible for their plotted extermination, no longer lives, the edict to kill the Jews still does. As we open this chapter, the question still remains: Will all of Esther and Mordecai’s work in the end be for nothing?

Esther and Mordecai are now set over the house of Haman, with the king even giving his signet ring to Mordecai, making him the highest ranking official under the king. Leveraging this opportunity, Esther ditches her calculated strategies and launches into an emotional plea. She begs the king to reconsider the mass killing of the Jews that he cosigned, asking him how he could bear destroying the people of his beloved queen. The king’s initial response is not what Esther was hoping for. His reply essentially is, "Look, I’ve given you tons of money and killed your enemy. What more could you want?" But it isn’t money and status that Esther is after; it’s life.

Sensing this wasn’t the response Esther and Mordecai wanted, the king continues on, telling them to write whatever edict they want and to seal it with his signet. No edict of the king may be revoked, so the initial order to kill the Jews remains in effect. However, the king gives them permission to write another edict, against the first one, in an attempt to save the Jews...yes, it’s very confusing. Mordecai immediately gets to work and sends out, on specially bred horses, a new edict in contradiction to Haman’s edict. The edict states that the Jews could fight back against whomever attacked them. Everywhere the edict reached, the response was joy. It appears that God has worked through his silent sovereignty to save his people.

Esther’s speech to the king in this passage serves to contrast the difference between life in King Ahasuerus’ empire and life in God’s Kingdom. In order for Esther to convince the king to no longer kill her people, she appeals to emotion, not reason. "Justice" for the King of Persia was not something you’d want to bank on. Yet in God’s Kingdom we see the opposite. Unlike King Ahasuerus, God doesn’t lay aside justice and act on mere emotion to save us. No, on the cross we see a God, in love, save us by pouring out his justice on Christ. In the crucifixion, perfect love and unwavering justice meet, and the outcome for us is new life.



MESSAGE NOTES AND APPLICATION

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

PASSAGE QUESTIONS

1. Read Esther 4:1-3 and 8:15-17. What contrasts do you see between the response to Haman's edict to destroy God's people and to Mordecai's new edict to save God's people?

2. God's salvation should always produce joy out of his people. Yet we often can struggle to find that joy in our day-to-day experience. What are some things that hinder you personally from walking in the joy of Christ's redemption?

Esther 

PRAYER

Father, thank you for, in love, sending your son to satisfy your justice and make sons and daughters out of orphans without a home. Thank you for the joy of your salvation! Help us this week to walk in the constant reminder that it is finished, and your son Jesus is making all things new.

Amen.

PRAYER REQUESTS



STUDY 8 – VICTORY FOR GOD’S PEOPLE

READ: ESTHER 9:1–19

...on the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, the reverse occurred: the Jews gained mastery over those who hated them. –Esther 9:1b

OVERVIEW

For those of us who don’t enjoy war stories—the special few of us who skip pages or fast-forward through battle scenes to get to the chatty parts—the ninth chapter of Esther can stir up conflicting emotions. We rejoice, because God’s people have prevailed, but that doesn’t stop us from questioning why such violence had to occur at all. Couldn’t the edict from Mordecai have just as easily called for a day of peace to replace Haman’s evil plan? Or perhaps God could have confused the enemies of his people—as he did in the days of Jehoshaphat—so that the Jews could survive unscathed without being forced to kill. Throughout the king’s provinces, the Jews ended up killing 75,000 of their enemies on the day of the edict. In Susa, they killed 500, and then Queen Esther requested that the edict be extended another day so that the battle could continue.

This day of permissible violence is a bit overwhelming. But when we step back and look at the day of the edict in the context of God’s bigger plan, we can see his immense wisdom in it. This was the day the tables turned for his people in Persia, and he didn’t waste a single detail.

First, the edict written by Mordecai and Esther and signed by the king was the best option available, because the first edict could not be revoked. Doing anything to nullify the original edict would have gone against the law and undermined the authority of the king. Therefore, it had to stand that it was legal for anyone in the empire to kill their Jewish neighbors on that day. By allowing the Jews to take up arms and defend themselves, a potential genocide instead became a battle. Second, God used the battle to place his people in greater safety than they would have been in had no fighting taken place. Fear fell on their enemies, the leaders of the provinces helped the Jewish people, and some even pretended to be Jewish for their own protection. Finally, it’s important to note that the Jews in Persia did not follow the entire edict. Though permitted by Mordecai’s words, they laid no hands on the plunder, signifying that this was a holy war. They weren’t fighting for their own gain; they were fighting for the Kingdom of God.



MESSAGE NOTES AND APPLICATION

Write down notes as you listen to the sermon and read the text. What is the main point of the text? What catches your attention, challenges, or confuses you?

PASSAGE QUESTIONS

1. Think back on a difficult time in your life. How can you now see God's wisdom and protection in it? How did God use this situation to further his Kingdom? If you can't yet see it, ask God to show you how he was at work in the midst of the storm.

2. What are some of the ways in which God protected his people on the day of the edict?



PRAYER

Lord, nothing is impossible with you. We praise you for your wisdom and faithfulness. Your ways are so far above our ways! Thank you for using imperfect people like us to accomplish your good purposes. Teach us to walk in wisdom and faith as we are guided by your Spirit. Thank you, Jesus, for giving us the power to confidently fight against the enemy, because you have already won the battle.

Amen.

PRAYER REQUESTS



STUDY 9 – THE FEAST AND THE LEGACY

READ: ESTHER 9:20–10:3

...and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor. –Esther 9:22

OVERVIEW

Take a minute to imagine what it felt like to be a Jew in Persia on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar. They had spent the majority of the year dreading the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, because that was the day they would likely be killed. For months, they mourned. I picture them trying to go about their daily lives—going to work, caring for children, planting and storing food for the future—while uncertainty loomed and the weight of grief was heavy on their chests. Then, in a matter of days, everything changed. On a day when they once thought all would be lost, thousands of their enemies were wiped out instead. Those who spent countless hours lying in sackcloth and ashes were suddenly feared and respected, and one of their own was given a place of high honor in the empire, second only to the king. While they were fasting in support of Queen Esther as she prepared to approach the king on their behalf, do you think they ever imagined such a deliverance?

For the Jews in Persia, a season of sorrow quickly turned to gladness and celebration. As was fitting, a holiday was declared so that they would always remember the relief they experienced on those days. Each year, they would keep the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the twelfth month as “days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor” (Esther 9:22). The holiday was called Purim, after the term Pur (the stones used to cast lots), because Haman had cast lots to destroy the Jews.

What seemed like a last-minute rescue to Esther, Mordecai, and the other Jewish people in Persia wasn't last-minute for God. Every detail of the story occurred at just the right time to bring about justice and deliverance. God promised to preserve his people, and nothing could stand in the way of his plans—not the evil Haman or an erratic king, or even the Jews' own disobedience. And the same is true today for all who belong to the family of God. Jesus states in Matthew 16:18 that “on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” In his wisdom, mercy, love, and faithfulness, God is always at work doing countless things we don't see, always at the perfect time. His promises are true, and his plans are good.

Esther

PRAYER

We praise you, Lord, for the things you have done and the things yet to come! You are able to do so much more than we ask or imagine. Help us to better understand your character; to know you more and hear your voice. Forgive us for the times we've doubted your goodness, wisdom, and power. You are the God who can create something out of nothing. You breathed life into dry bones, parted the sea, and saved your people from destruction again and again. You've promised a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit. We celebrate what you've done and look forward to the day we'll experience the fullness of your victory.

Amen.

PRAYER REQUESTS

Esther 

NOTES